

# LABY RINTH

COLLEGE OF SAN MATEO • THE WRITERS PROJECT

ISSUE 11

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The Writers Project and Labyrinth staff would like to extend our sincere thanks to:

The CSM Honors Project faculty, staff, and students, with special thanks to David Laderman, for their continued support of our club and our vision,

our inspiring club advisors, Sarah Mangin and Keira Travis,

the always encouraging ASCSM,

and

the students who submitted their work to be considered for this publication.

We want to thank you for reading our new issue of Labyrinth and hope that this publication continues to inspire you.

Keep writing. Keep learning. Keep creating.



Labyrinth Issue 11

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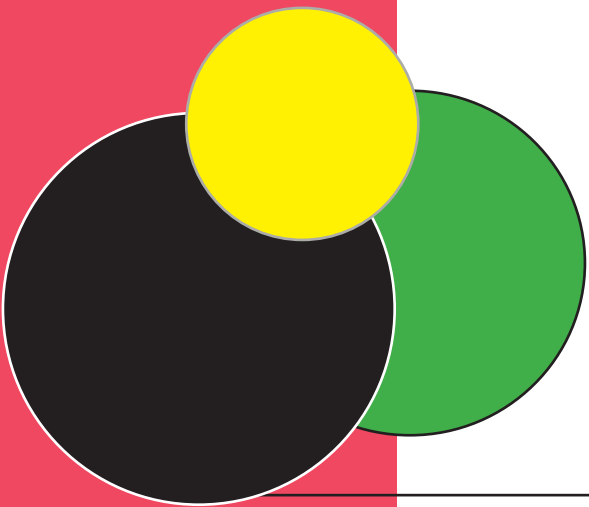
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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

"Labyrinth has always been a celebration of student work, a collection of pieces that we feel should be shared and published. This collection is indeed a celebration, but it is also a worthy time capsule. The former two Editors in Chief sent out the call for submissions during late February 2020, a time when we knew something bad was happening around the world. We had no idea that, within the month, we would be sent home, unable to work on the newest issue. Looking back on the work we received, it is about regret, belonging, and love; it is not about COVID, quarantine, or any of the other topics we are all too familiar with today. This issue, which is publishing nearly all of the few submissions received during the chaotic transition, shows the last memory of a pre-pandemic world. No masks, no stay-at-home order, and no day-to-day dullness.

This issue was made entirely from home, thanks to an incredible team of students that I was lucky enough to lead. Our goal was to celebrate our fellow students' creative work. We wanted to capture the last moments before our lives were changed, and I know we did just that. I was so excited and nervous to be the Editor-in-Chief of this great magazine, especially from home. With a lot of moral support from the former EICs and the advisors, I felt ready to lead the creation of this issue. I am so thankful for the hard work everyone put in; we never could have done it without their effort.

To everyone reading this, if there is anything I have learned during this quarantine, it is this: keep engaging with art and keep creating.

Thank you for reading."

- Candela Graciarena







Recollections  
and  
Reminiscence



# Clock Retrograde

By Diana Mendez

When was it?

When the love ran out

When the rivers dried

When the nights got cold

Return the clocks

To that which was

I know times have changed

But I have not

Memories keep me from moving on

From your sweet smile

Romanticized moments

Still stuck in my head

Like the leaves on that oak tree,

You changed from the night to the day

Yet I wish



For the past

Flowing

Further away

Uncharted

That's where you left me

In the middle of somewhere

Dusk or dawn?

Nowhere to go

So suddenly

You changed anything

For your everything

Only you

You

Uncharted

All these memories

Keep me lost

In a maze

Until I realize my mistake.





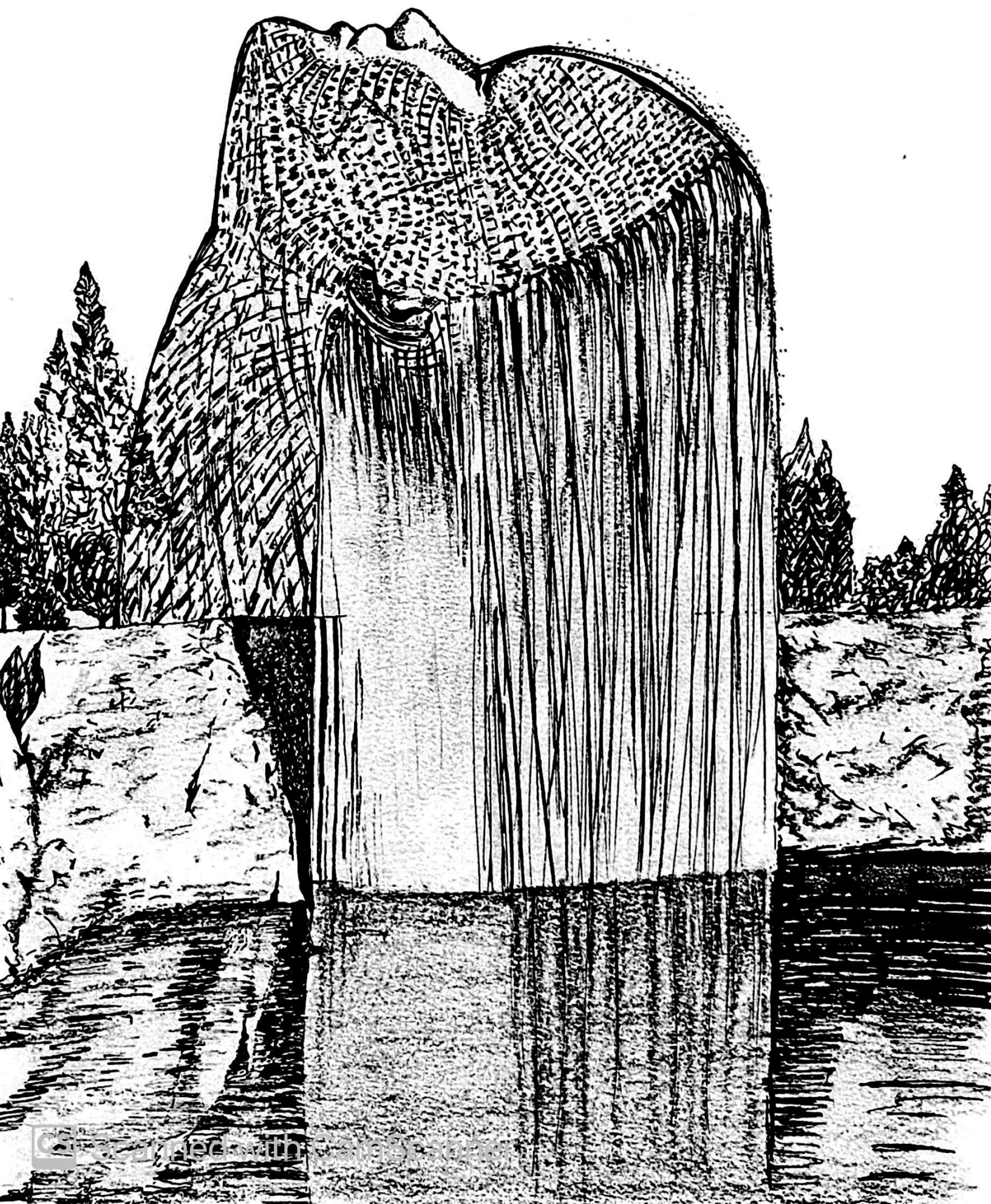


# Current State of Mind

By Josephine Laus

Like a ferris wheel ride,  
By the carnival side.  
I'm stuck in a loop  
This havoc is going down a slide.  
I quiet my head;  
So many thoughts running a spread.  
A dark storm brewing within her.  
She has a strange glare.

But alas, there is no calm before the storm.  
She became the storm. It has always owned her.





# Childhood

By Xuanyuan Fu

I lived with my grandfather and grandma when I was young.

There is a locust tree in front of my house, which is very common in the countryside. I like to rub his bark, it tastes very sweet. The locust tree is easy to attract insects, especially in summer. At night I sleep with my grandmother. My grandmother would shake the bamboo fan, she would be sleepy when she was shaking and it would hit me on the face.

Grandma is very white and a little fat. There is a cute "butterfly sleeve" under the arm. There is a very comfortable fragrance of floral water on the body--me too. Every night my grandmother took a bath for me: in the chilly courtyard, my grandmother heated a pot of warm water, and I just sat inside. Oh, my grandma will drop a few drops of floral water before I jump in. The floral water is filled with dark green transparent glass bottles, which are very beautiful, much like the deep pool water or the stained glass of the church. There is a circle of wrapping paper attached to it. The words "Floral Water" are written in block letters.

My grandmother loves beauty. She will use the old shaver to shave the hair behind her neck. My grandmother will dye her hair every two months. When I come back, the smell of the toilet water will have a chemical smell, which I hate. I have told my grandmother more than once that she should not be dyed, and her white hair looks pretty. But she said, "Yeah, white hair is beautiful, but it should be all white. Half black and half white is not 'good-looking'" it seems that she just can't accept the process of intermediate conversion.

Grandpa doesn't talk much to me. My grandfather loves reading. He watched the weather forecast every day after he watched the newscast, and he fought. We all set tables to eat in front of the TV, and on several occasions, I suspected that he would plant it in the soup. I don't know when he got up, maybe four or five in the morning, but he seems to get up every day to stretch out on the roof and sit and exercise. Oh, our family is a two-story bungalow with a small roof. It's beautiful. There are also some vegetables growing on it, four chickens, and a lot of lotus flowers. There are small fish in them, all of which are celadon and white, and they are also very beautiful. My grandfather didn't share the room with my grandmother very early.

My grandfather went to the toilet after exercising. The small bungalows are not so advanced, they can only squat. But there is another small window above the head. In fact, it is not a small window; it is the kind of windowpane in the Suzhou garden. I remember it was a yellow-brown color tone, which is the pattern of the bird. Through the gaps, you can see the bamboo forest. The toilet is very bright, no, it should be very bright. Just right, very comfortable natural light, neither dazzling nor dark. Then my grandfather would hang out on the street. For example, what kind of old bookstalls, or what kind of antiques to go to the flower and bird market. I drove his two bicycles that I couldn't call my own. Sometimes I go out with him; it is fun, he always spoils me, he pays for everything I want to buy.

However, I usually stay with my grandmother. Grandma got up at about 7:30 in the morning. Every time she called me up, I saw that the clock in front of the window was 7:50, so I guess it was about 7:30. Then what will the grandmother do? Oh, it's generally grocery shopping, or else weaving clothes. In this way, one morning passed. In the afternoon, grandpa and grandma will be at home. Grandpa reads in his room. Many big and thick brown books. When I was a kid, I liked climbing to Grandpa's Table Mountain to annoy him. Turn over the corner of the book he just folded, or pour out the jasmine tea he made, and replace it with iced green tea that my parents put in the refrigerator, or add fine salt in it. He was never angry, just looked at me with a "creak" smile, holding a ballpoint pen on my forehead, or pinching my little ear.



Grandma will also read books. But my grandmother seemed to read only one book. It is a collection of poems. I don't know who the author of that collection is. It's just a bit old, but the paper is smooth and flat, and the paper is very tough. I can only remember words like "flower" and "step shake" in that collection.

In the evening, sometimes my parents will come over to eat with us. Grandma can cook fried potatoes, steamed vinegar fish, vermicelli winter melon pig's trotter soup, and corn radish ribs soup. Do not add salt to both types of soup--sticky soy sauce is best. Pig's trotters should be white. I often have a sausage when I eat. I'll probably be full in two small bowls with rice. After eating, I would watch my parents get in the car on the second floor. The window on the second floor is facing the street, and next to the window is a black painted sofa. I usually kneel on the sofa, waving through the barbed wire to my parents, watching the lights disappear. Then I will take a shower and go to bed. My grandmother usually tells me something, and there are stories and chatter. I still remember once, she told me a story about ghosts. Bluffing me, I threatened to cut off the tree at the door immediately. Who knows, I forgot the next day when I woke up.

The days when I was a child were spent with nature and with my grandparents. I wouldn't talk about catching small lizards and picking fruits, fishing for small fish, scaring kittens and puppies, fishing for small tadpoles, etc. Everyone is almost similar, right? I really miss it, but I can't go back. So I like children very much and envy them.

This summer, I visited my grandparents again. When I left my grandfather's house that day, I walked while holding his hand, and my inexplicable emotion jumped on me and kept me crying. Looking at his wrinkle seemed like a knife-cut expression. If the grandfather and grandmother died, my childhood would be cut forever.







# Overwhelmed

By T. G. Lutge

A full numbness overcomes my senses

An echoed vibration hums in my head

A tinted vignette shades the landscape of my vision

My back clothed

My eyes closed. If they open

I shall wake up dead

I'm off when I'm on to you

Hope forgives

Release whatever feelings you hold close,

I'm willing to forget

But I'll love the one who leads me close, closer.

The pessimism clogs my throat

I scratch at it, aiming to dislodge the feeling of angst

All of my beloved dreads and fears assimilate into one uniform phalanx

They attack in perfect unison







# Promises of Hope





# The Work of a Lifetime

By Margaret Morgan-Butcher

When I was 19, I dropped out of college. I was living in New York at the time, enrolled in Manhattan College, a small liberal arts school in the Bronx. Halfway through the first semester of my sophomore year, I received a call from my mother informing me that she could no longer afford to help pay my tuition. I was forced to recognize that my time in school was about to end, maybe forever. This moment marked an extremely pivotal turning point in my life and radically altered my previous trajectory. It defined the course of the next four years and took me on a journey I could never have predicted. My attitude toward the end of my tenure at Manhattan College created a victim narrative that radically diminished my self-concept and complicated my transition back to university.

During my freshman year, I was a diligent student, receiving straight A's both semesters and earning a coveted position as supplemental instructor of history. Success in school comprised my entire identity and dictated the way in which I maintained my self-esteem. My friends were good students as well and we would often spend our nights and weekends together, engaged in deep conversations or mutual study, completely engrossed in the experience of academia. I derived huge significance from this new, self-created identity at Manhattan College—it allowed me to believe in expanded possibilities for my life. Academic success in college rewrote previous narratives I'd created: that I simply wasn't a good student or would never achieve success in an intellectual sphere. Finding my footing in New York imbued my existence with newfound confidence and enjoyment. The quality of my work and the diligence of my studies soared as I found the impetus to succeed.

When I discovered that my time at Manhattan College would be ending permanently at the conclusion of the semester, my mindset about school completely changed. In retrospect, it felt as though I needed to kill the dreams born from my success at school in order to accept the loss with a minimal sense of sadness and self-pity. Essentially, if I didn't deserve to stay in school, it would be no great loss when the privilege was revoked. This mentality of self-sabotage proceeded for the duration of my only semester as a sophomore. I struggled more academically that semester than I ever had in my life. My grades plummeted and I procrastinated endlessly, placing all my focus on being a good supplemental instructor to my history class. I indulged in far more unhealthy, escapist behavior than ever before, and the effect on my performance in school was abundantly clear.

When the semester ended, I was completely demoralized. I'd withdrawn from one class and earned C's in two others. Never had I failed so dramatically in an arena in which I'd previously excelled. I was in a significant amount of debt to my school and the government for unpaid tuition fees and student loans.

Unable to accept such an abrupt departure from New York, I moved in with my boyfriend and his friends in their shabby Bronx apartment and began working for a catering company servicing Manhattan College students and staff during events and on-campus activities. This proximity to a school where I no longer felt welcome increased my envious, bitter attitude about my situation and further deepened my reliance on negative habits and substances. It took a long time to dig myself out of the hole I'd created during this period of my life.

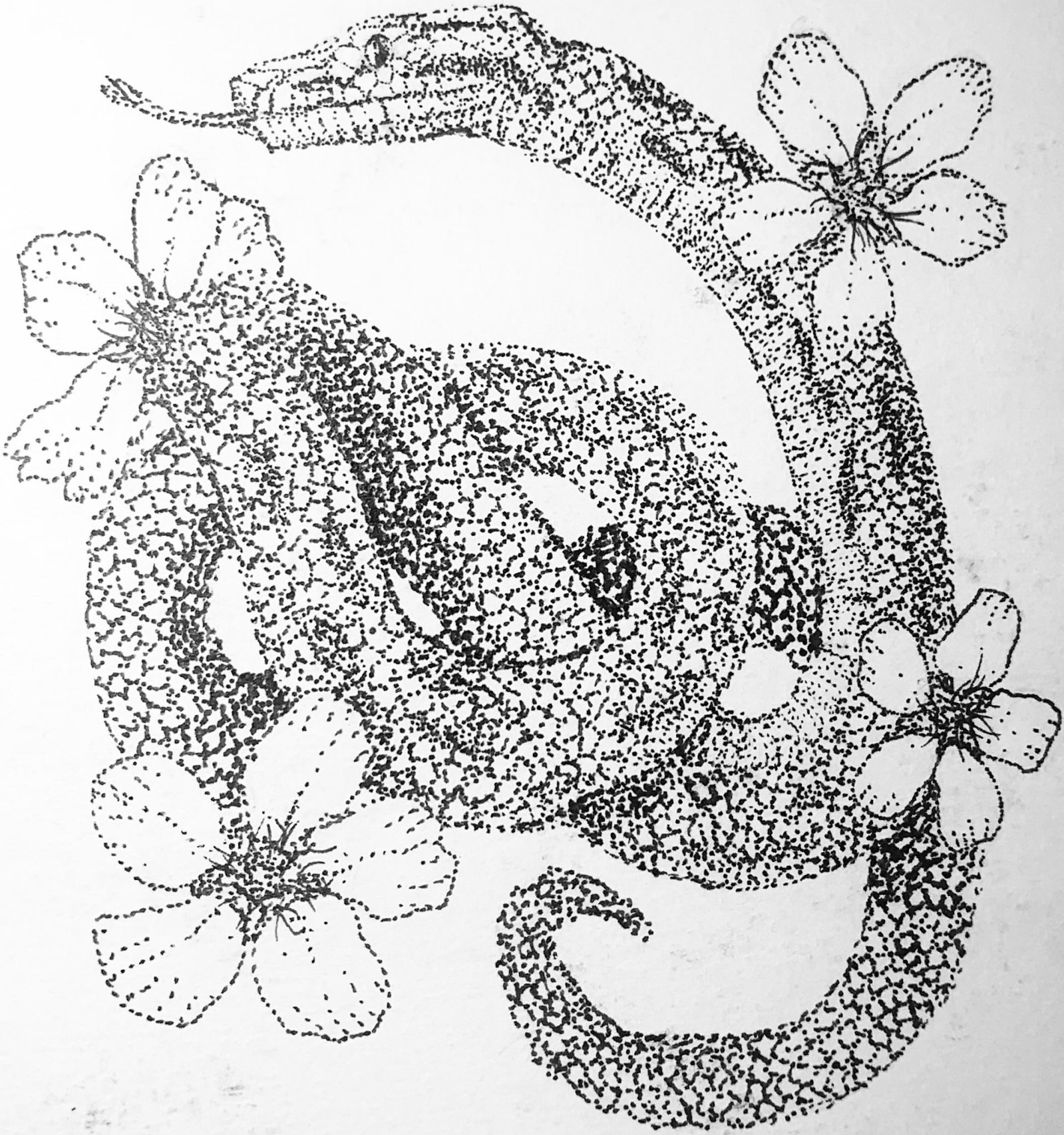
This is the story I've told and retold myself throughout the years since leaving Manhattan College. I'd come to believe wholeheartedly in the narrative of the promising young student, sabotaged by financial hardship and unfair circumstances. Time and distance have given me visibility on where I went wrong by constructing a story in which I was completely devoid of blame for what transpired. This protected me from the acknowledgment of my failures and allowed me to sustain a cycle of self-pity, victimization, and fragility. Financial hardship always beleaguered my family and numerous complicated decisions contributed to the premature end of my stint in New York.



In order to improve the quality of my future, I had to take responsibility and adopt an attitude of personal accountability surrounding what I experienced at 19.

After a semester of catering in New York, I moved home to California and began working for a property management company in Silicon Valley. After a year, I'd completely repaid my Manhattan College student loans. It took far longer to reconstruct my self-esteem after the dramatic failure at Manhattan College. I continued to struggle at community college for several quarters upon my return, unable to reconcile who I thought I was with who I'd become. The challenge of a full-time job and night classes proved extremely difficult early on, but eventually, I developed the strength and discipline to succeed. Only recently was I able to save enough money to fully recommit to attending school full-time. I submitted applications to UC Berkeley, Santa Clara University, and Claremont McKenna College for the fall 2020 semester and excitedly await the opportunity to apply myself fully to academia once again. In order to rebuild my self-esteem and motivation to succeed, I had to rewrite my victim narrative to one of empowerment and motivation.

Like many community college students, my journey to a better, more fulfilling life has not been easy. In my case, it took years for me to develop the redemptive sense of optimism necessary to believe in myself again. I hope that my peers might read this and discover a renewed feeling of hope for their future ambitions as well. The process of improving counterproductive habits and negative thoughts is the work of a lifetime. Our willingness to apply ourselves and take difficult steps toward a better future indicates a tremendous amount of resilience and dedication. It's truly aspirational to find myself surrounded by so many diligent, hard working people succeeding in the face of frequently unfair odds.





# Broken Dancers

By Stella Escobar

There is a ballet dancer

With a beautiful smile

And yearning eyes

She dances with a yearning

For the shards of her broken dreams

And an intimacy she's never known

His heart reaches out to her

Following the anguish in her movements

Longing to ease her pain

They share many memories

Of whispered 3 a.m. conversations

Of secret sleepy smiles the following day

They've since become strangers

But still, he watches

As she bleeds into her art

He wants to lift her from her sorrows

But he can only look on in silent agony

And seek the sunshine of a new spring







# An American Soul

By J. Enrique Martinez

"For the America of freedom has been an America of sacrifice, and the cost of becoming American has been high. For every freedom won, a tradition lost. For every second generation assimilated, a first generation in one way or another spurned. For the gains of goods and services, an identity lost, an uncertainty found. The great immigration...created a scarred American soul." This quote from Thomas Wheeler's *The Immigrant Experience: The Anguish of Becoming American* spans the entire temporal progression of an immigrant, from the historical hardships of beginning the path to identifying as an immigrant in America, all through the impact that resonates into the children born on American soil. Immediately, the thoughts of my parents' struggles in America came to mind.

My earliest memories include carefully observing my mother shifting her weight back and forth cleaning rugs and floors; why I was there watching her clean houses all day I would not understand for some time.

For the first few months of my life, I'd ride the MUNI bus with my mom from house to house, boss to boss, until one morning my mom noticed I was smiling at someone on the bus. She looked in the direction that so captivated my attention and noticed my grandmother across from us. Initially, my grandma hadn't been too pleased that my mother came to America and within a year had a child, but the delight she saw coming from me that morning left my grandmother brimming with the golden joy of a summer sky at sunset. From that day on my grandma would take care of me and at any opportunity, she would look after both my mother and father.

Both my parents felt the immediate anguish of becoming American Immigrants, and my sister and I would feel the strain of trying to assimilate in a place where we feel we do not always belong. My father came to America in the early 80's and for the first few jobs he'd managed to get, he immediately had to begin learning English and assume his new culture.



As a younger person, the notion of being forced to trade your culture and language for the more socially relevant one upset me--his new job freedom meant his old customs were to be left in a native land from his past. The adoption of a new set of customs is an understandable and necessary transition for any immigrant, no matter where they come from or where they go. This is not to say that immigrants should fully deprive themselves of any irrelevant social traditions; instead, they should fully embrace the behaviors and social mannerisms of their new nation. Established social order should be voluntarily adhered to if one looks to that nation for change and good health. All this being said, my father's progression toward becoming an American led him to adopt some undesirable habits. He became a heavy drinker, his method for coping with multiple jobs and loneliness.

My father's jobs have always included him being a worker, a pawn, rarely in direct supervision of anyone. He was assigned jobs and he had to complete them without delay. Having been drafted to the Salvadorian Republic Military at age 15 and living rurally with his alcoholic father and meek mother, he lacked any formal education beyond home-taught arithmetic and some reading.

These strict academic limits posed great obstacles during his hiring processes. Shortly after arriving in America, he began as a dishwasher at McCormick and Kuletto, then he became a cook, and after some time in the restaurant industry, he returned to his native craft: construction. Working at Tempco, he likely would have had more opportunities were it not for his limited grasp of the English language. Not knowing English in America has always upset my father and made him feel inferior to all those who can speak it--a complex that would be passed on to his offspring in the years to come.

Many years and a broken relationship later, my father met my mother in 1995. My mother, with all the shortcomings my father had along with being unable to do the rugged labor demanded from construction, found the job market much more difficult to enter. She became her own boss as a house cleaner. Being self-employed certainly developed a sense of entitlement in my mother, but when you're cleaning up after the elderly and faced with the arrogant abandon of the young and rich, the entitlement is forgotten, overshadowed by the daily grind of inglorious labor. My mother worked through her pregnancy with me and continued to work only days after I was born. When I was old enough, a few months old, I would go with her on the MUNI, traveling from house to house in aim to accrue enough funds to pay the rent due on 24 Virginia St.

My mother continues at the same job, self-employed, 23 years later. From time to time I overhear her conversations with her employers, the difficulty in her spoken English, the condescension on the other line, my mother, saying yes to her many bosses. I listen to her get yelled at for dust left behind and broken glassware. She has put her ego aside for 23 years to raise, almost entirely by herself, two first generation Americans and three non-conformist immigrant children that she paid to bring over from El Salvador. These children, now bitter adults, misinterpreted my mom's drive and focus on providing for her family as neglect of their youth.

It's a genuine struggle to leave everything behind on faith that an ultimate risk will yield a better life. All of these losses aside, both of my parents now own homes and live comfortably after every day of hard work. They continue to age everyday doing their assigned tasks, making their living. While their risks have now yielded enormous reward, I can't help but still feel the meekness I catch in my parents' eyes when they do so much as order a meal in an American restaurant. They've served as laborers all their lives, peasants, and the cost is the exhaustion of their pride when questioned by authority, even the one that is serving their meal.

Often, I feel my voice leave when I'm told to be proud and speak to an audience. I roll my hands together at the thought of having to be brave.

I was born with inherited inferiority, and my younger sister experiences it too. Yet, I remain the toughest in difficult social situations. I've had to defend my family from being scolded for mistakes and protected them from patronizing figures of authority, not to mention ordering food at restaurants. From a young age I've seen my mother, father and sister struggle to find their voices. I've seen the struggle in myself, recoiling and evading the need to speak. Yes, my family and I are proud of our strong characteristics but some nagging sense of not belonging or being accepted makes our courage seek refuge as a welled-up pit in our throats. Watching your parents being depicted as aliens to the world in which you were born has adverse developmental effects on your self-consciousness and identity formation.

Nevertheless, I teach my sister to be proud of her origins while fully embracing our home. I encourage her to be strong in her first semester of college, to become the pride that our parents left behind. This is why I have chosen and will commit to my difficult academic path. Largely, for the joy of learning, but also and just as significantly, because I want my whole family to see me, to acknowledge and meet the hands and eyes of pride and success. The feelings of inferiority die on my path to success, and at that summit, my family and I rejoice in finally feeling like a part of the sacred American soul.

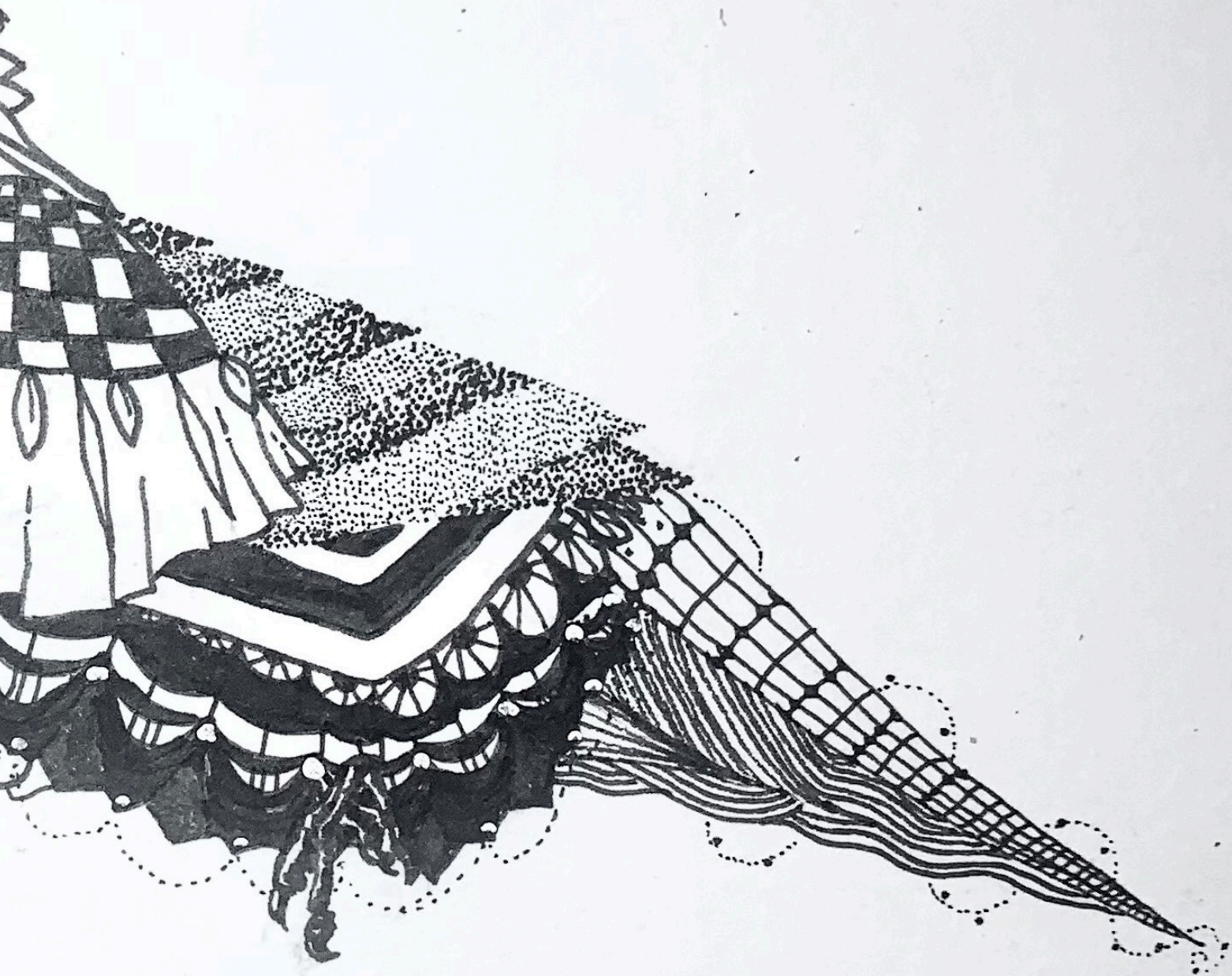
























# Art Glossary

**Cover:** *Solis Memento* by Diana Mendez

**Credits:** *See* by Jiatong Liu

**First Divider:** *Untitled* by Kemmy Rai

Page 9: *Daze* by Diana Mendez

Page 11: *Untitled* by Kemmy Rai

Page 15: *Untitled* by Kemmy Rai

Page 17: *Rocio* by Diana Mendez

**Second Divider:** *Untitled* by Kemmy Rai

Page 22: *Serpentine* by Diana Mendez

Page 25: *Untitled* by Kemmy Rai

Page 29: *Awaken* by Diana Mendez

Page 30 and 31: *Humming Trance* by Diana Mendez

Page 32 and 33: *Sunny Beach* by T. G. Lutge

Page 34: *Australia* by Diana Mendez

**Back Cover:** *California Coast* by T. G. Lutge

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