Laurel Moon Spring 2017

saudade

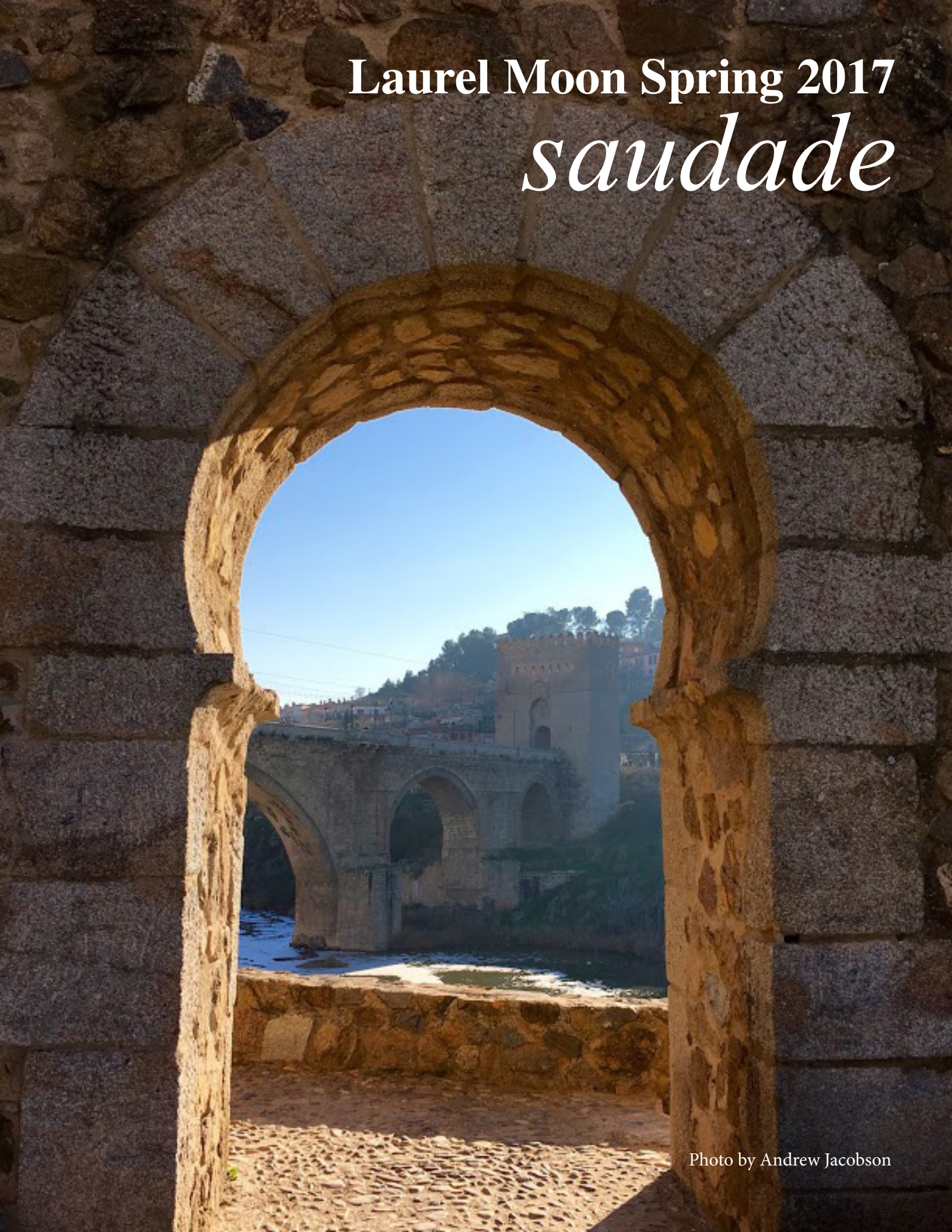


Photo by Andrew Jacobson

Laurel Moon
saudade

Spring 2017

Saudade,
sad, sawdust days
sudded in silence,
for the things you
can never grasp.

Saudade is a Portugese and Galician term with various definitions. It can mean a melancholic nostalgia for someone or something that perhaps has not even happened yet. It may also carry the feeling of nostalgia for something that will never happen again.

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Dear reader,

Thank you for picking up the Spring 2017 issue of Laurel Moon. As graduation fast approaches, we are both very grateful and fortunate for this publication and all the hard work that has been dedicated to creating this magazine. We'd like to thank all of our editorial board members for coming together and devoting their efforts to this literary development.

Saudade proved to be an appropriate title for this issue given the end of our journey at Brandeis. The poems in this issue reflect this intangible quality of saudade, tapping into themes like longing, lonliness, and new beginnings. Although our Brandeis chapter comes to an end, we are excited with the assurance that the responsibility of this magazine rests in reliable hands.

This issue also announces the winners for two prizes, the Grossbardt and Dafna Awards, presented by the English Department. We are thankful for the Department's guidance, as well as the support and expertise of judges S. P. Elledge and Jenny Factor. Finally, of course, we'd like to thank everyone who has submitted their pieces to Laurel Moon in the past year and who continues to support us in many ways.

What a great ending to a rewarding and exciting undergraduate experience! Congratulations to the graduating class of 2017!

~Clayre and Bidushi
Editors-in-Chief

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Laurel Moon is Brandeis' oldest student-run publication. Every piece you are about to read is written by a Brandeis student and was selected with care by the editorial staff.

Laurel Moon also holds weekly meetings. We invite you to stop by whenever you can. We'd love to have you! Meetings are held in the BMC (third floor of the SCC) at 7 p.m. every Monday.

If you are interested in receiving information about any upcoming workshops, meetings, or events, please sign up for the listserv (laurelmoon@lists.brandeis.edu).

You can also look us up on Wordpress (laurelmoonbrandeis.wordpress.com) or Facebook (facebook.com/moonlaurels/).

The cover photo was taken by Andrew Jacobson . The back cover page was taken by Morgan Mayback. Please email laurelmoonbrandeis@gmail.com with any further questions.

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Virgo, Violet Votive Herb

Clayre Benzadon

You're a virgin of
sacrifice. A goddess
feeding the harvest moon
palm frond offerings
from your palms.

The remaining soil
in your fist will turn
the full sun into nectar
under Mercury's core,
an earth apple spotted
with gold-dusted chamomile.

Bathe in the lavender dew
of mercurial sea until rose-
mary needles of golden rain,
an Aphroditic ear of grain,
drapes around your head.

Tie the knot connecting
galaxy clusters to Spica,
spiked star shimmering with
vestal Vindemiatrix, divine
grape gatherer. Then cultivate
Mars globes of lavandula.

Marriage to the jaded king
of herbs is inevitable. Sacred
leaves always seep through
Mars' aquatic craters. Basil
particularly sprinkles out of
nowhere: from holy water, tulsi,

a potted pom-pom poem.
Sometimes from a Satanic
symbol, a peppermint omen.

Remember to place it in
your hands. Under the mouth.
Surrender. Pray to reach
a blue god, maybe Vishnu.
Then settle, with the atmosphere
melting away in ablation.

That Voice

Salena Deane

Nailbeds are crooked, cracked, corrupted. Notice
the stench of attitude; Notice
the stretch of solitude. The magnitude
of my existence scares me.

The solitude undo-s me, parades me
like an A. At home, the feelings are at bay.
Hey you!—You, you fool!
Thinking, thoughts I have thought before. Thought
it could be okay. Thought I'd
be okay.

Cadenza for Inferno

Linfei Yang

That ruby dress
How white fades to red
Doesn't it just call out to you?

You've got the steroid
Shots in your legs
And they are what'll let
You dance again but

It's as if none of that matters
When you spin
Like a dreidel
Hard as they're praying
On this Shabbat you
Have your own way
Of turning these tables
Your bhindi is your chapel
From which a lotus blooms on your head
As you tear up this stage
Rather than tear up instead

In the face
Of Asura's gaze weighs heavy like
Textbooks you never use
Nights you never sleep
The men who never leave
Paths you never choose
But you just shake them off
With the bobbing
Of your shoulders
Like some bad chakra as
Throbbing in the limelight
Has never been
So great
To contrast ebony against
The elements gripped
In your hands
A proof
That bodies may atrophy
But dreams never do
That it was never a dance
For a man alone
But for a woman alone
Who can carry her home
With the downward turns of her palms
And spins around again who

With a smile that
Might just smite you
And 998 arms less
She says:
"I know there are bruises on my legs
But I won't stop for even your begs
You better firmly grasp that stick
And help me beat this devil to death"

Ab pachhtaaye hote kya,
Jab chidiya chug gayi khet?
Jaan hai to jahan hai.

As the Earth Spins Around the Sun

Natalia Gonzalez

when we dance
you ask my two left feet to become friends
our stage is both your living room and the cobblestone streets of Buzios

when we dance
our laughter is both the sound we twirl to
and the living proof that happiness has three syllables that you can clap your hands to

when we dance
i don't need high heels,
for the earth beneath my toes takes me higher than any shoe ever would

when we dance
my hips want to sway alongside the waves
competing with every rise and fall,
for the attention of an audience that we will never care to bow to

when we dance
you spin me quickly,
dip my head back
and suddenly my head is dipped into the river,
more holy than john
you spin me quickly
as the earth spins around the sun

when we dance
mother nature roars in applause,
for her children have finally learned to salsa to her rhythm

Souls that Feed Beauty

Santiago Montoya

I still do not remember how I got here, in this dark and moribund hole, where not even the rats can see. I do not know where I am. I do not even know how is it that I got here. I was a kid living in the comunas of Medellín, where the electricity was no more than a legend and the water was like gold and therefore a luxury that was barely attainable. Our house had parts covered with cardboard boxes, which were previously used, given away, reused, or thrown away.

I never went to school, I did not learn how to read or write, the only thing that streets taught me was how to steal. I used to rob bread from the bakeries, the refined one-hundred-percent cotton sheets from the old blind ladies who held canes, and plundered the coins out of the public telephones—it was like breaking apart a piggy bank. If I review every place where I have lived in retrospect, I do not seem to find anything that I have done wrong.

My mother always congratulated me for everything I did. She used the coins I gave her, she would eat the bread that I would bring to her, and converted the sheets into one of her colorful sexy and flirty dresses. She used to say that her appearance was the only thing that allowed us two to have a roof over our heads. I loved my mother a lot and it is because of that affection that I would do anything she would ask for.

After Federico, my mother's friend, who would occasionally visit her, left, I went into her room. The table was filled with some kind of white powder and next to it were some paper rolls, all scattered haphazardly. She was laying there on her bed, upside down and with a cigarette in her hand and semi naked—she seemed exhausted and sick.

She knew I was there in the room and said: "Dieguito, I think I'm dying. You're gonna have to live with the neighbors."

I looked at her, feeling frightened, and she noticed my preoccupation and my desire to break into tears.

She responded, advising me that there was a solution. I would have to steal babies' souls: "That's the only way, Dieguito. The soul of a baby equals one more month of my life. Bring me that soul and you will have your mamma at your side for as long as you wish." With those words, my mother gave me a silver necklace, a very special one that could only be obtained by requesting it from a wise old witch who lives high on mount remedies. Everyone knows she is the only one who could fabric them. My mother swore that with such a necklace, nobody would ever catch me alive, because the necklace would protect me.

During the night, far from the comunas, I would break into foreign houses and search for babies who were deep in sleep. Their little souls were playful and slippery, but they fit inside what used to be a strawberry jar. I remember that the little bodies deflated when I stole their soul—it was as if a balloon had lost all its air.

The souls were good to my mamma; not only did she gain vitality, but was able to lose a few wrinkles and gray hairs. Of course, she went back to her old profession, and the house opened once again to all her male friends. I must admit that I never got to closely meet any of them; I only know that most of them were males and some of them were amicable with me, giving me candy and dummies out of the blue.

While time passed, I had to rummage very well around the many towns of Medellín. The babies could not be found. What I heard, from some gossiping tongues, where that many parents were moving with their babies to other parts of the country. Other couples were deciding to abstain from having babies at the moment so that they would not risk having the ugly surprise of one morning seeing their baby's body deflated and with nothing inside, as if somebody had squeezed all the juice out of it like a lemon.

One day, I was not able to even find one infant body. The babies from the areas were all gone. I remember when I told mamma about it. She got pretty upset and yelled at me: "Why do you always get on my nerves? You can't disappoint me. I'm your only mother so you need to do this for me… Look! Just look at how much money I've been making. We gonna be dirty rich, Dieguito… can't you see? …Go outside and don't come back until you get me that soul!"

What I did was find a 7-year-old boy. He was strolling on the street, wearing his school uniform. It seemed like he just got out of school and was about to get on the school bus. When I caught him, he resisted and attempted to rip my clothes off, yanking any part

of me that would reach his grasp. It was hard to get him; he was not as defenseless as the babies were. Once I dragged him to nearest corner, he was mine.

I stole his soul. My mother would not be able to tell the difference. I placed it in one of my jam jars (this one used to hold raspberry jam) and brought it back to my mother's house. She recreated the same ceremony that she's done before with the others—she opened the jar, took the soul out firm, but with delicacy, and sucked it like a vacuum cleaner does to dust.

It turned out that the parents of the 7-year-old happened to be two important business-people, who owned a multinational cold meat company. They had become rich slaughtering pigs and cattle for sixty-five years in the market. They had a lot of power and connections around the country. The day their son's body appeared, on the street, deflated, the father swore to find the culprit and make that person pay. Those were more or less the words of the man who spoke on the radio—I overheard it from the neighbor's. I did not tell my mom, because she still was fooled into the idea that the last soul she sucked up belonged to a baby and not a 7-year-old. Yet I doubt that the people outside could trace me or, worst, find me—we were at the peripheral of the city, we weren't anybody's business; we were invisible.

It did not take any longer for me to notice that I had lost my silver necklace, I did not know where had I put it. I thought it was at home, since I would only wear it whenever I had to go and do errands for mamma around the city. In fact, the last time I wore it was when I stole the soul of that 7-year-old boy. I got worried.

And I had no other choice but to tell mamma. She had a roll of paper inside one of her nostrils and the white powder was disappearing from the table where it was at as she moved the roll, attached to her nostril, forward. It gave me the impression that she was practicing how to suck the future souls. As a result of what I had just told her, she burst and erupted three times, each time the surroundings trembling more and more each time, so much so that it caused part of the house to fall down. She was not acting very much herself. She really made a loud and egregious scene, but then came to realize the troubles that could arise and ran three miles to find a phone and call the witch from mount remedies. The witch told her that she would have to buy her silence; the witch's list of clients is not confidential to anybody.

My mother turned to look at me: "You're on this on your own, Dieguito. I never asked nor allowed you to take the soul of a creature that was older than 12 months old. Not even the soul of a 7-year-old is completely clean in order to fully rejuvenate me. You tried to break my business, that's what you were trying to do, didn't you? Kid, you've disobeyed me. You've failed me—now pay for what you did."

I decided to flee high up in the mountains. A place where I was sure no man would ever find me. I did not have the merest remote idea of what was going to happen to me. About a few months after, in which I survived eating mangos and edible leaves, I went back to the abandoned house—the house I used to call home. I asked the neighbors what had occurred and they told me that some men had come for my mamma and that they took her soul with them. When I got into the house, I was able to see her deflated body on the floor. I still loved her. I cried, and prayed the Lord's prayer for her soul. Everything in the house was gone—everything we ever fought for.

I decided the best thing was for me to give in to the police's demands. The day I got my sentence, the father of the 7-year-old boy came up to me and told me: "Your mother sucked the innocence you once had; your own soul. Look at you now. You're a delinquent—a murderer…I gotta tell ya', son, that's what we the adults do: suck the innocence of the little ones, and that's what I'm about to do to you."

In this moment, I am in a very dark and unknown place. I have no idea how is it that I got here, I only know they placed me onto a chair and I entered into a deep sleep. I know I am not alive anymore, that's a fact. And the only thing I know is that not even the rats can see in this black darkness.

New Plath

Salena Deane

She has nothing on me-
Years-maybe
But sorrow
I doubt it.

Not contemplating pre-natured death
Just feeling it while I'm alive

A suggestive word
Alive.
As if living is some energetic verb.
For others-maybe

My Stillborn Spider looking in the Mirror
sees its Facelift,
shriveled like a Mushroom.
She screams to the Sculptor "I Am Vertical!"

After the Arrival of the Bee Box,
We will inherit the world
And eat men like air.

A gift never tasted so sour.

Dando una Torta

Clayre Benzadon

Sizzled *shhs*
on the pan after
loud patting of hands

kneading masa, tortillas
slapped as if they were

the small pat of las
sandalias right below
my seven-year-old ankles.

It looks so easy, the way Margarita
dips her hands in water, Miami
sunlight glinting

on her wrists while she smoothens
out moisture—*es así*—folding
it again into a perfect round shape,

flattened oval a reminder
of something sweeter.

quiero pancakes,

I say. Mi querida segunda madre,
paid to mother me, stares hard,
furrowed—

Sin vergüenza.

Her mouth curls around
the sour word, bland dough
of her work, soggy,

and now I see the bubbling
privilege, batter syrupy,
light ease, what it smothers—

younger, I replaced the laborious
shape with complanate complacency,

abandoned her intimate faith,
her cornmeal-pounding dense,
until it calloused her hands,
the warmth in her work
unteachable, her native

Salvadorean hammered
into flap-
jacks—

with her culture jack-
hammered, floppily
integrated into
the griddled mix,

now, yes, only now
do I see desapercibido.

Advice to a Friend

Ben Rozonoyer

Blue unseen rattlesnake
in and out of the limestone
slivers silvery venom
at heels of passersby.

Cuidado, compadre!

White shining sunball
bakes the earth dry
like cornbread, overdone
in the gringo's oven.

You stay in the shade!

Stay in the shade, while there's time,
and strum your banjo:
that's all I want from you now.
And let your stallion rest up
under the sycamore tree's tall shade.

And wait for me there, friend!

Requiem for Ophelia

Rebecca Kahn

Pray you, love, remember I
am mad with remembrances of you.

I bear rosemary to the creek bed to
cover the cavings time will not

erase my rosemary for remembrance
as I wish time make me mad with

thoughts of you. I have no
thoughts for how he

took two lives for granted.
Took two lives for pansies and dug for

two graves, two days, no heart
of mine runs cold over those cavings

bluing to whither away as violets
when time granted two lives mad

with remembrances. One life, pray
you loved to rue for you and rue

for me. I pray you, love, remember
time is not kind to us. Love,

I am mad to remember you.
I pray the waters were kind to you.

Otherwise, thoughts and remembrances
make a document of madness in me.

Energy Nuggets

Noah Harper

Joanna sits in her car, in front of the Newton Upper Falls McDonald's, paralyzed by her competing impulses. She wants the nuggets bad.

She knows where the Chicken McNuggets come from. She's seen the exposés revealing the sickening pulverization of the unplucked chicken's entire body—bones, feathers and all—into a fine pink paste covered in chemicals. But she doesn't care.

Or, at least, her gut, the visceral part of her that made the impulsive buying choices (though not her actual gut, which would rather she'd choose something a little more fibrous), has its proverbial heart set on eating the breaded industrial meat byproducts.

She often finds her subconscious drifting off during the day, dreaming about them: the crisp texture and perfect cookie-cutter shape; the way the warm, dimensionless meat melts in her mouth; the convenient denominations of five or ten—or even twenty—that they come in.

She's been sitting in this parking lot for twenty minutes, with her Prius idling, emitting a tinier amount of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere than most other cars. But still enough to make a difference.

Joanna considers herself a socially and environmentally conscious person. Though she does drive a car, it's completely out of necessity, and she definitely feels guilty because of it. She works for an NGO, and even volunteers in her free time. She's a vegan too, which is why the nugget situation feels so especially grotesque.

It started out somewhat innocuously. In truth, she wasn't entirely sober the first time. She'd been driving home on the Pike during the middle of the night and was starving, and nothing else was open. She blames her slightly altered state of mind for the slip-up, for that first ten-piece. But at only five dollars, they'd seemed so reasonably priced, and they'd been prepared so quickly too, and they'd tasted so *delicious*.

Joanna, too, possesses enough impartiality to know that she struggles with certain mood issues. Try as she might, it's often difficult to make it all the way through the day while maintaining a sunny disposition. Truthfully, she feels numb the majority of the time, entirely drained of energy, regularly lacking an able capacity to enjoy things. But the nuggets changed all that.

She'd first noticed the effects the morning after. She hadn't been able to eat all ten pieces in the car, and, in her stupor, had accidentally brought the box inside and left it on the counter. That had been her second mistake.

The next morning, for whatever reason, perhaps because her head was aching or she was feeling particularly depleted, in lieu of breakfast she'd just eaten the last two nuggets. It had been easy, really. She'd just popped them in her mouth, barely chewed and quickly swallowed that crispy, moist mass. Maybe it was because she'd already resigned herself to feeling especially terrible that day, and this was just another way to rub it in.

Around four that afternoon she first noticed it, or, rather, the lack of it. The dour thoughts had not gathered as usual—instead, she was, for some reason, experiencing a relative freedom from that usual emotional purgatory. Joanna felt nearly optimistic, and the strange, almost foreign sensations even continued well into the next day. She was, of course, left with no other choice but to attribute the feelings to the Chicken McNuggets.

That had started it all, and there'd been no going back. At first, she'd tried limiting herself to just one ten-piece per week—usually on a Monday or Tuesday, when things were especially low. But that had been impossible. Even now, she can't deny that she feels good after eating the nuggets. How can she say no to that—to herself?

And she's tried all the antidepressants, several years ago. The psychiatrist had even slowly ramped up the dosage—all to little effect. Somehow, they'd made her feel worse. Fuck the Prozac and Zoloft, now she has her Chicken McNuggets, and they actually work too.

But Joanna readily admits that the nugget ideation is a problem. The cravings have been getting bad, almost insatiable. She's even found herself making a chart of all the McDonald's in a twenty-mile radius, so she can hit them up regularly without anyone getting too suspicious—*suspicious of what?* It's not like Chicken McNuggets are a controlled substance or anything.

Not yet anyway, she thinks. That's what they'll

do when they catch on. That's what they always do.

And the side effects aren't too bad. Her stomach usually feels kind of weird after eating them—her digestive system is definitely not a fan. But that innate something, like her heart or her soul, actually feels good, and that makes it all worth it—the paranoid restaurant mapping and daily drives and occasional diarrhea—because the nuggets make everything else bearable.

Or, at least, that's how part of her mind thinks about it. The other part, the one that consciously knows where the nuggets are coming from, and the fact that she's fed a horrible corporate behemoth with her dollars is, of course, a little guilty—and the shame from that holds its own power over her. And now these two warring impulses are at an impasse.

Joanna knows she's stuck here, sitting here in her car, unable to go in and get the nuggets, but equally incapable of putting on her seatbelt and driving away.

Her hands grip the steering wheel. A bead of sweat appears on her forehead. It's not that cold out, but she still has the heat on full-blast—the nugget-craving part of her mind thought it might help force her out of the car. She joggles her foot, and then suddenly worries that it will accidentally hit the accelerator and drive the car forward into the McDonald's and break through the wall and smash into the three people that are lined up there waiting to order.

She looks in through the window, past the promotional banner advertising Shamrock Shakes. She recognizes him in there: Luís, the assistant manager. They'd struck up a little bit of a rapport—he always seems to be the cashier when she comes in to get her fix.

Oh god, she thinks. *I'm starting to develop relationships. I'm getting attached.*

Joanna feels the sudden urge to intentionally step on the accelerator and drive her car straight into the concrete and glass of the McDonald's exterior. Then, at least, it'll all be over—they'll put her in prison then—the nuggets can't get to her in there.

She frowns. There is, of course, the prison-industrial complex that she'll become a part of. In there, she'll probably get addicted to something just as bad, like sloppy joes or fish sticks. And she'll probably have to join a gang or something.

She looks down at her stomach. A slight paunch is beginning to develop where her previously well-toned abs used to be. Joanna used to be someone who prided herself on her appearance. But again, the nuggets are making all of that impossible.

She hears a honk and a squeal of tires, and instinctively turns around to see what just happened. There's been a near-miss behind her. A car in the parking lot had almost struck a woman lumbering toward her car. Joanna recognizes her, it's Leann—another Upper Falls Mickey D's regular.

And then Joanna sees it. That red sign with the white, faux-cursive lettering. It's over there, just right across the street, her salvation: Newton got a new Wendy's. Maybe a Frosty will fix things.

Fruits

Julia Ryan

You smiled when the blossoms died
and I was so appalled.
I asked how the crumbling dust
could bring you any joy.

And you said, no,
you didn't smile for their state;

It wasn't some gladness,
as I first thought,
at the rude contrast between
fresh and rotten,
new and forgotten,
blackest dirt and softest cotton -

You smiled, simply, just because
you had other things left to smile about.
You had your own hidden blossoms
that you knew would never die.

I wanted to ask what those were
and where I could find my own,
but I didn't think you would answer,
or maybe I was afraid that you would.

So instead you and I
buried the stems together,
in silence.

Months later there were different blooms
and petals with stronger, sweeter perfumes
and there were birds with brighter plumes
but you and I remembered,
underneath the green,
a tomb.

SHADES OF MOONLIGHT

Rebecca Kahn

he, standing next to me
under the purple haze of
february midnight.
knees blanketed in snow
soaking pant legs in
moonlit powdered white.

tree arm shadows the color
of blood vessels crackling,
neck crunchy beneath
teeth & tongue.
love bruises staining the

snow my body
purpled with blessings.
sky swollen with light
dirt, the earth, graces us.
tonight, we do not
deserve the moon.

(“We don’t deserve the moon” is a line from
Dorianne Laux’s poem “Facts About the Moon”)

Beginnings

Danielle Rock

"Can I help you, miss?"

The hard metal of a .44 shifted in Cassia's pocket as she turned to look at the store clerk. "Just looking thanks." She ducked her head and wandered the convenience store's aisles, waiting for the last customer to leave.

Could she go through with this?

Fluorescent lights flickered and buzzed overhead. Cassia pretended to inspect the drinks in the refrigerator. The bottled water taunted her from behind glass doors. She swallowed the lump in her dry throat. Sealing them in a metal bank vault wouldn't make them any less accessible. Her stomach rumbled as she surveyed overflowing shelves in the cashier's direct view. No stealing in plain sight; she couldn't risk him catching her yet. Her eyes gobbled up the snack aisle as she walked along it. So many types of chips, candy, nuts, and dried fruit; it made Cassia's mouth water.

The dinging of the bell above the door broke her out of her reverie. The last customer finally left—only Cassia and the cashier occupied the store.

Now or never.

Cassia wrapped an old scarf around the bottom half of her face and pulled up her hood. She grabbed a bag of sour cream and onion chips off the shelf and approached the counter. They used to be her favorite chips when she was a kid. She still technically was a child at 15 years old, but it hadn't felt that way in a long time. Cassia tried to sync her breathing to the slow, even click of her shoes on the hard-tiled floor as she drew near.

The cashier gave her a tight-lipped smile as she approached. His dark, close-cropped hair and wire-rimmed glasses reminded her of her father. She pushed the stab of grief down and forced a smile. She didn't want to look suspicious.

"Will that be all today, miss?" The man asked.

Cassia drew her gun as he peered down to scan her chips.

"Hands up right now! Slowly. Don't make me use this." Cassia pointed the gun at the store clerk. Cassia knew her emaciated body and shaking hands didn't look intimidating, but she hoped the gun would be convincing enough. She steadied her trembling hands.

The clerk's eyes narrowed, assessing her before slowly lowering his hands below the counter.

Cassia's hands tightened around the gun and her gaze flitted down, over the worn clothes she hadn't changed in weeks. Dirt and holes marred her once-white hood. Tattered sweatpants slouched above her filth-covered feet. The musty stench from the scarf that a homeless women traded for Cassia's last bit of food made her stomach twist in a queasy knot.

Cassia grabbed her duffle bag off the blue-and-green-tiled floor and slammed it on the coffee-stained green counter. "Hurry up and put the money in the bag." She demanded through gritted teeth.

"Okay, okay. Please don't shoot me. I've got a family." The man's voice cracked as he opened the register and began placing bills slowly into the bag.

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"Is that everything?" Cassia glared at the cashier.

"Yes." The cashier slowly backed away from the register.

The sound of sirens screamed in Cassia's ear. Blue and red streaked through the inky night. She didn't realize she had dropped her gun until it hit the floor and spun away. Cars braked in front of the store, headlights temporarily blinding her.

"Come out with your hands up." A megaphone crackled outside the store.

Cassia grabbed the duffel bag and bounded over the counter, knocking the clerk down, and ran through the back door. Overflowing garbage cans lined the deserted alleyway, their stench enveloping her as she sprinted away. Her breath rasped in her throat, coming in hard, fast gasps. She swerved away from populated Main Street and clambered up the chain-link fence to the street beyond. The cold, rusted metal cut her hands and her scarf snagged on a loose link.

Cassia heard the door burst open behind her and chanced a peek over her shoulder. The cashier pointed at her. "She's getting away!" Officers shoved past him and spilled into the alleyway as she heaved herself to the top of the fence.

"Open fire!" called out an officer. Bullets whizzed by Cassia's head as she dropped down from the top of the fence. Her legs ached after she hit the

ground, but she forced herself to keep going and dashed out onto the street. She raced towards the park down the gravel, and dove into the bushes as a police car passed by. She slept that night, for what she hoped was the last time, under the stars.

***

Cassia pulled up her hood as she walked slowly toward the bus stop. People passed by a figure sleeping, prone on the bench in a tattered trench coat, inside the bus shelter. *Mom.* Cassia's heart found its way into her throat as she approached and swallowed before reaching an arm out to shake her mother.

Cassia's mother blinked a few times before hauling to a sitting position. She took Cassia's face in her hands and kissed her on both cheeks.

"Where have you been? I looked all night for you." She stood and collected a small bag she had been using as a pillow.

Cassia opened her mouth and hesitated before snapping it shut. *How could she possibly explain herself?*

The rolling thunder of a bus engine snapped her to attention.

"I'll explain everything later. We need to get on this bus." Cassia grabbed her mother by the elbow and guided her to the edge of the sidewalk. The bus stopped with a groan from its ancient break lines and opened its doors.

"Cassia we can't afford this. This is going South." Her mother turned around and began walking toward the bench.

"Yes we can Mom, look." Cassia pulls two tickets out of her pocket, "I got us two one-way tickets to Charleston. We can't stay here another winter. You got sick last year. Come on!"

Cassia grabbed her mother and hauled her onto the bus, handing the driver their tickets. The bus was nearly packed, but Cassia guided them into two seats in the back. As she sat, she placed her duffle bag in her lap. Her chest constricted as she began to slowly unzip it. Her mother peered inside and sat back with a jolt, raising a hand to her mouth in silent horror.

"How could you do this? They'll always be after you now." Her mother snarled at her from behind her hand.

"I covered myself up, no one saw me. Promise." Cassia zipped the bag shut."We can use this money Mom. Start over." The bus doors squealed as they shut, and the engine roared to life as the bus pulled away from the curb. The vehicle drove a short distance while Cassia's mother stared down at her daughter. *It's like she's never seen me before.* Cassia looked away under her mother's withering glare. Red and blue lights dance across the bus and sirens blare as the bus pulls off to the side.

Cassia froze as the police cars blaze by the bus. She took a short, gasp of breath through her teeth as her mother placed her hand over hers."We'll make a fresh start sweetie. I promise." She squeezed Cassia's hand.

"These are one-way tickets so there's no going back anyway." She forced a laugh as she watched the red and blue sirens disappear over the horizon.

II.

Sivan Spector

swimming in my own ocean
I try to pull out some
ancient whale skeletal &
decomposing in a trench—
there is nothing there
but stale breath
drifting now—
once I was so ruined
I had to remeet my hands
learn to speak again
I have rebuilt myself
a vacant house.

the empty cloud
covered street lined
with cherry trees
that I walked down every day
until it carved a space inside my gut
I left in a sudden rush of desperation
not to return again. not to return.
it has led me here
to the ruinous in-between
where neither devastation nor nature nor joy guides me

when I have some time alone
I lay around thinking
until I cry
I lay around thinking
of you
until my flesh aches.

IV.: Strange Love Poem

Sivan Spector

-I want you to kiss my hips and belly and ribs and shoulder corners and shoulder blades and the length of my spine and my butt and my breasts and the back of my thighs and the base of my throat where my neck meets my chest.

-I'll never remember all that.

-I want you to want to kiss all those places; it's not a matter of remembering.

-Still I'll forget one and you'll be upset

(the giraffes that don't exist for anyone but me whisper of suicide not in any serious way but just so I remember it's there)

-It's okay I'll draw you a connect the dots.

(I do so)

He looks at the number one scrawled in the corner of my shoulder & misses it kissing me on the soft flesh between my shoulder & my neck a tender stop I didn't think of but which is exactly where I wanted him to kiss me & it sends me into ecstatic oblivion

Damascus Gate Market October 28th 2016

Linfei Yang

1.

Three different shades of
Bell pepper
Stands out starkly against this
Hell-weather
I go from the stale of old car
To the
Stench of animal piss
No deity can help me through this
Monday shopping list

2.

You can tell how well the market's going
By how loud the guy is shouting
Tel Aviv! Tel Aviv!
Though he knows full well
No easy rides will I be taking
So back off with that outstretched hand
I'm not giving away money
Even in this holy land

3.

Can you spot
The obvious
Plain clothes cops
Trying hard
To pretend they're just Jews having a picnic?
Unroused by the Asian language
Mingled among the Arabic

4.

And down by Al-Ayoubi's restaurant the
Immigrant sits next to Jewish Ethiopian
Even after yesterday's incident
No one sits alone
That point when even orange juice
Can do a better job
Of chilling you to the bones

5.
The boy slides down the stairs
As the owner watches
Arms crossing on the counter
A sad look in his eyes
He has no idea
How Jerusalem is going to swallow him

6.

"It's dangerous to be texting at Damascus Gate
You know" Father says.
But it's not even safe to be dead
He thinks I'm crazy but hey
I did buy 120 shekels of groceries today

Loneliness

Ben Rozonoyer

"On melancholy and lamp-broken nights like these I prefer to wallow in tragic mirth."

~ A Philosophical Poet

A lonely goose stood stranded between the border of marshes and highway that led into New York City. He didn't nibble the sparse grass beneath his webbed feet, nor did his expressionless face seem to take any palpable pleasure in the shafts of the translucent September sun. A head, stationed upon an unnaturally long neck, made its monotonous sideways motion as he tried to catch a glimpse of the automobiles that were flashing and rushing by, none of them giving a thought to the feathered troglodyte. Back and forth twisted the passionless eyes over the prolonged neck in an eternal effort to connect with a sympathetic pair of the same. But alas, there was not a second goose flashing and rushing across the highway to reciprocate the impulses of the lonely heart. Geese had long vanished from I-78 and its vicinities. Cars passed by, packed with humans, and disappeared in the blink of an eye. To the humans, it was a blink of an eye, that is. To the lonely goose, who did not have eyelids to blink with, each disappearing car was an eternal moving moment of desolation and distance. People, happy people, sad people, smoking people, all passed through the mental frame and vanished into the towering steel marshes of the metropolis. And with each departing unheedful vehicle the rupture in the goose's heartstrings widened and sweltered. They would tear, sure enough, but the goose had never studied anatomy and was unaware of the internal damage that his benevolent efforts were, so mercilessly self-inflicting.

Quite suddenly the goose threw down his glasses and cursed. He cursed so abusively and profanely that the whole cosmos seemed to shrink and rattle at the voice of his caustic words. He cursed for a long time, pitilessly invoking every damnation that he had learned in his former aerial and aquatic lifespan. But alas, his profanities were drowned by the unstoppable roaring and winging ocean of midday traffic, headed to New York City with the same urgency as thirsty beasts to their waterhole. The goose tired of his cursing, and sank down on the greenless land in exasperation. But alas, even there he was pricked by the shards of the glasses that he had just cast earthward, and he jumped and swore once again, but only for a short time. Beads of abandoned and helpless tears rhythmically impacted the moist earth. The sun did not see them, for it had just hid itself behind the concrete of an overhanging bridge; the marshy ground was already moist and cared little about their impact; the sound of their patter was swallowed up by the clinking and clacking of cars on the New York thruway.

The goose, O Reader, is the Tragic Poet – the broken-winged troglodyte, who settled from the sky's ether between the borders of civilization and wilderness. Pay heed, O Unheedful Passerby, to his cosmic abandonment, that the wounds and sorrows of creative torment may not swelter and rupture as did once the sorry stuff of the goose's heartstrings.

Yellow Dress

Julia Ryan

I wore a yellow dress on the day you died,
An airy sunbeam with a fine ruffled pocket,
But I changed into black as everyone cried
And fawned over your hair that I kept in my locket.

I'd worn the same dress on the day that we met;
We were walking and talking and learning to sing
And later I'd pawned it to pay a month's debt
So you swore, for your thanks, you'd give me everything.

The yellow dress saw our birthdays, my church,
And I lent it to friends who all wanted to shine,
But returned it with woes of their own fruitless search
Seeking, in vain, a replacement for mine.

Still I had to wear black on that blackest day,
Draining slowly into a long unlit night;
My sunny dress, hidden and tucked deep away,
Couldn't give nor receive any merciful light.

When I next slipped it on, it hung wrong on my frame,
Appearing now old and year-weary worn;
Frustrated, I tried to arrange it the same -
What else can I wear the next time you're born?

A Winter Trail

Colin Hodgson

The path was well worn. The snow was no longer fresh and pure – there were tracks of all sorts of creatures crisscrossing this way and that. The trees, bare and tinted white from the cold, shuddered softly in the sky. The consistent faint rush of water could be heard in the distance. Wispy clouds shift shaped and scuttled between the trees. He exhaled and a newly formed cloud floated away.

He stepped into the forest and glanced about. He dropped his head and followed the path. He did not look up for some time. The path widened and narrowed aimlessly. Twice he came upon a fork in the path and did not give it more than a passing glance.

Finally he had walked so far into the forest that it was unclear if the path continued, came to an end, or had come to an end long ago. Only one set of footprints was left, continuing off into the distance. He stopped next to a rotted tree. It stood straight, though white and yellow fungus with black spots sprouted from all sides of the trunk. Bark cracked and crumbled up and down the tree, and underneath the dried bark was wood the texture of frozen sawdust. He did not look at the tree. Instead he looked intently at the snow just below the tree.

Dark blood pooled at the bottom of an indentation in the snow, and small drops of blood splattered the surrounding vegetation. A black rock peeked out from underneath the white snow, wet and glistening from the blood. A set of footprints was visible walking away from the depression in the snow, accompanied by a trail of blood. He viewed each aspect of the scene slowly and then set out after the bloody trail.

He would go a hundred feet and only pass a few drops, then suddenly come across almost a full square foot of blood, then would not see any blood for several dozen feet. Once he noticed that some blood had been sprayed upon the lower branches of a small tree. It seemed to have tainted and burned through part of the branches. The tips were red and the slightest touch of a finger sent them crumbling into the snow. When they reached the snow the bark melted away and blood seeped into snow. It flowed into a footprint, and filled it to the brim. He moved on.

A squirrel scurried out from under a rock, raced across his feet, and hurdled up a tree. It left no trace in the snow. He hesitated a moment and glanced up. The squirrel stood lazily perpendicular to the tree and stared back at him. He turned back to the bloody trail, and the squirrel fell to the ground, screeching in panic.

As he journeyed deeper into the forest the snow began to take on a reddish tint. There was still only a single set of footprints. The trees had begun to swarm him and only the occasional ray of sunlight punched through. The trees still had all their leaves, each one a different shade of bright red. At times he had to squeeze his body through the trunks, they were so close together. The drops of blood were much scarcer and spread apart than they had been, and he struggled to follow the path.

The sound from a nearby waterfall was deafening. Water white as snow slammed into the shadowy black rocks waiting below. The sound penetrated the swarm of trees and rustled the branches, shaking the oldest and driest leaves gently to the ground. He looked about, searching for the source of the noise, but found nothing. More and more dark red leaves fell about him until he could no longer see even the closest tree, mere feet in front of him. Sharp lines of sunlight rained down through the shadows, and the shower of leaves took on a graceful liquidity. The sky was bleeding and the ground flooded with blood. It sounded like a tidal wave, and as he inched forward he no longer knew which way was up and which way was down. Suddenly he tumbled to the ground and everything went black.

When he awoke he immediately reached his hand to his head. He looked at his hand, and saw that it was covered in blood. He rolled onto his side and struggled to his feet, leaning on a rotten tree. It stood straight, though white and yellow fungus with black spots sprouted from all sides of the trunk. The bark crumbled in his hand. He looked down at the spot where he had fell. There was an obvious imprint of his fallen body. In the middle of the imprint there was a stone dripping with blood. The snow around the stone was also drenched in blood. He looked back the way he had come. The snow was fresh and untouched. He turned the other way and stumbled off into the woods. His were the only footprints, and they were sprinkled with the blood dripping from his open wound.

Laurel Moon Editorial Board

Clayre Benzadón
Editor-in-Chief
Clayre is graduating with a degree that might help her in the future, because like most seniors, she has an exact idea of what she plans to do with her life. She also likes to joke around a lot, meaning that last part of her bio was a lie. In all seriousness, though, she is very glad to have worked on Laurel Moon, her baby, with the incredible rest of staff members and other editor-in-chief, Bidushi. She knows she will safely pass this along to next generation, in good hands.

Bidushi Adhikari
Editor-in-Chief
Bidushi is struggling to cope with the end of her senior year, but understands that all good things end. Aside from drowing in job apps (somebody hire her!), she's reviewing her thesis, attempting to code, and hoping for a C+ in Financial Economics. She's grateful for another great semester with Laurel Moon and would like to thank everyone for their hard work in creating this issue!

Yijie Liu
Yijie is a first year who is considering double major in English and Linguistics. She cooks a lot because she believes the most efficient way to spread her culture is food, and she also plays a Chinese traditional instrument. She is new to Laurel Moon but she really likes all the people there and she hopes to contribute more next semester.

Bianca Meniuk
Bianca was born and raised in São Paulo, Brazil, and likes to teach people to say random things in Portuguese. She is currently a Sophomore pursuing a double major in Russian Studies and History, and a minor in Comparative Literature. She sometimes blames her attitude on being a Taurus.

Danielle Rock
Danielle Rock is a rising Senior who never sleeps and stays awake through sheer stress and panic alone. Her hobbies include wearing a single pair of sweatpants for as long as humanly possible and trying all the "trendy" food she can get her hands on. Her very few talents include eating way past the point of being full and watching TV without moving for hours at a time. She's very excited for this upcoming issue of Laurel Moon and for what comes next.

Leah Scher
What's good? Leah is a first-year and also a millennial, which is why she thought she'd make a "dope af" social media person for Laurel Moon. Leah has this crazy idea that one day she might get paid to write or produce a movie. She also cried 3 times during the movie Lion. Yeah. She writes mostly because she has a godawful memory and would forget literally everything if she didn't turn what she sees into a poem. She draws inspiration for her literary voice mostly from writer/director Wes Anderson, and for her lifestyle from her grandmas. How cute is that omg.

Leah Leybzon
Leah Leybzon is a first year and midyear at Brandeis. Although her interests generally lie in the sciences, she still enjoys creative writing and appreciates being a part of the poetry work shopping process. When not trying to pass calculus, Leah likes to hike, read and catch up on TV shows.

The Grossbardt and Dafna Awards

The Grossbardt Memorial Poetry Prize is awarded annually to one poem published in Laurel Moon over the course of the school year. Andrew Grossbardt was a poet who passed in the fall of 1979. He studied at Brandeis University and received his Ph.D. posthumously from the University of Utah. His poetry has been published in the New Yorker and in a chapbook entitled "The Travellers."

For the academic year 2016-2017, Clayre Benzadon's piece, "Dando una Torta," was chosen for the Grossbardt award.; her work can be read in the Spring 2017 issue of Laurel Moon.

Linfei Yang's piece "Damascus Gate Market October 28th 2016" was chosen as a runner up; his work can be read in the Spring 2017 issue of Laurel Moon.

*

The Dafna Zamarripa-Gesundheit Fiction Prize is awarded to a work of fiction published in Laurel Moon over the course of the academic year. Dafna Zamarripa-Gesundheit was a student at Brandeis University, a past editor of Laurel Moon and a member of the Creative Writing track who passed away prematurely at the end of her junior year. The prize honors her spirit and memory and is awarded to a piece of extraordinary fiction published in Laurel Moon.

For the academic year 2016-2017 Santiago Montoya's piece, "House to be Demolished," was chosen for the Dafna award; his work can be read in the Fall 2016 issue of Laurel Moon.

Noah Harper's piece,"Energy Nuggets," was chosen as a runner up; his work can be read in the Spring 2017 issue of Laurel Moon.

*

The fiction was read and judged by S.P. Elledge. S.P. Elledge is a graduate of the Iowa Writers Workshop and has taught creative writing at more than twelve colleges and universities, including Emerson, Wellesley, and Tufts. His work has been published in literary journals and magazines, and he has seven collections of stories available on Amazon.com.

The poetry was read and judged by Jenny Factor. Jenny Factor serves as the Core Faculty in Poetry at Antioch University Los Angeles, the only MFA program with a dual focus on literature and the pursuit of social justice. Her poem collection, *Unraveling at the Name* (Copper Canyon Press), was a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award.


Photo by Morgan Mayback