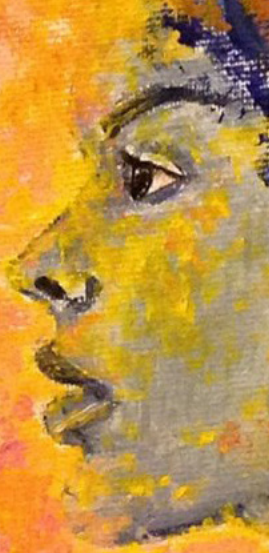


THE CATALYST

CONTEMPORARY LITERARY ARTS MAGAZINE



ISSUE 13 // WINTER 2018

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear reader(s),

Considering this year began on fire, it seems to me that we've made it to this point alright. I know "alright" is a bit of a stretch — trying to make sure I have everything ready for graduation with one less week than normal sent me to more than a few panics this quarter, but having a little bit less time than normal also put me in a place where I could only focus on what was important. There was no time to worry about things too far in the future to do anything about, and even less time to let myself linger in a past I can't change. Every day of this quarter has been about action — and while I have come to be intimately acquainted with exhaustion, I must say that in these nine short weeks, I've felt alive.

While I'm still coasting on this liveliness, I'd like to share a short story with you, if you'll allow me, in the hopes that the words mean as much to you as they did — and still do — to me. I loved my English teacher in high school. She had this sign on her wall where the classroom clock used to be. She said something along the lines of she'd never keep us longer than she was supposed to, but we had to stay there, present in the room with her. This sign read, "Fiction is Truth," and it was her way of reminding us that stories are powerful, that people use fiction to talk about things which they couldn't otherwise find the words for, and that just because something is fictional, that doesn't mean that it isn't real. And on my last day of high school, she gave my class letters that she'd written detailing how proud she was of us and how great she knew we could be. She ended this letter with an allusion to Peter Pan, telling us, "Never forget that you can fly." I always thought it was interesting, how she didn't say, "Never forget you *are flying*." I think she wanted us to choose the sky for ourselves.

I hung the letter on my wall in FT when I moved in freshman year. Every day, those words greeted me as a refrain, in both definitions of the word. They offered soothing from disappointments, and the promise of successes yet to come. As I sit here during my penultimate quarter at UCSB, reflecting on how I ended up even writing this letter to you all in the first place, I can't help but think about how many times those words have gotten me to where I needed to be. And I feel compelled to share the sentiment. These are troubled times that we're living in, and in watching this nation struggle to define itself, I can't help but think about how we each have to undergo the same process. It's not easy, choosing to live your truth, especially when you might not know what that is yet. So, my dear reader, I'd like to remind you that you matter. That you are loved and admired and valued. That the words you speak have meaning. And that you'll never have to take a leap of faith if you trust that you too, have wings.

ALL THE BEST,

Ricky Barajas

ON JULY 20TH, 2012, HEART LIGHT AND FANTASIES SATISFIED,

I exited the theater for *The Dark Knight Rises* and checked my phone to see 15 missed calls from my mother. I don't know what your relationship with your ma is like, but any time I have a single missed call, I know it's trouble. I had fifteen. My heart fell into my stomach, and my throat tied itself in a knot. I didn't want to call her back.

I took a moment to look back at my day and tried to remember what I had done to warrant 15 calls, but I couldn't think of anything. My room was clean, I had taken the trash out, my homework was done — hell, she had given me money to come here. I said my goodbyes to my friends, and trudged over to my car. With a sigh, I unlocked the door and got in. I debated for a little bit about not calling back and just driving home, but I decided against it.

“Siri, call Mama.”

“CALLING mama IPHONE.”

My heart pounded hard with the anticipation as the phone rang; meanwhile I was trying to come up with an excuse that would work for whatever I was in trouble for. I really didn't expect how she answered — through tears, she told me how glad she was that I was okay, how she loves me so much, and how proud she was of me.

I'll admit, I was slightly relieved to hear that I wasn't in trouble, but my mom is the in-bed-by-10pm type, so to have her crying and calling me at like one in the morning told me something else was up. “Ma,” I started, “What's the matter?”

“There was a shooting in Colorado,” she said, “It was at the same movie you saw and when you didn't answer your phone I just panicked. I didn't know what else to do. I just love you so much.”



On May 22nd, 2014, one of my friends from high school invited me to a party she was having at her house the next day. I told her I'd think about it. And I really did think about it. I hadn't been home in a while. All of my friends I hadn't seen since graduation were apparently also coming home for the weekend and were going to be there.

I'd had enough of college for a little while — one more night at Portola might have sent me to the hospital with food poisoning. So, early in the evening on May 23rd, in typical Ricky fashion, I kinda just packed my bag and took off. I figured I hadn't made plans with anyone in IV, so why bother telling anyone I was leaving, and it's not like my friends were going to turn me away at the door for showing up without RSVP-ing. I wanted to surprise them.

'Bout halfway or so into my two hour drive, my phone buzzed a bunch of times. I wanted to check, but when I was in high school we did this thing called Every 15 Minutes, which warned us about the potential dangers of texting and driving. I figured whoever it was could wait for me to finish my drive, and so there I went, flying down the freeway, probably singing my heart out to Frank Ocean's Channel Orange or something. I think it had been about ten minutes or so, after the onslaught of text messages, that my phone began to ring. I quickly glanced over at my phone sitting in the cupholder, and swiped answer.

“RICKY! THANK GOD. WHERE ARE YOU?”, my friend Nicole yelled into the phone, sounding both exasperated and relieved. “Uhhh, I'm on my way to Lancaster,” I replied, confused by her tone. “Wussup?”, I asked.

“There was a shooting. Someone got shot by 7/11 and James didn't know where you were, and I was worried.”

“Oh. Well yeah. I'm okay.”



On October 1st, 2017, I had seen news reports of a shooting in Vegas, and knowing that two of my best friends were there, I texted them to make sure they were fine.

“ANNE. ARE YOU AND LOIS OKAY??? PLEASE TELL ME YOU'RE OKAY.”

I sent the message and sat staring at my phone for a reply. Texting just really isn't fast enough for me sometimes, though. I had to make sure they were unharmed; I had to know they were safe. *This is probably what Ma and Nicole felt like*, I thought to myself. So I called. And then I called again.

“Hello?”

“Anne, thank god. Are you and Lois okay?”

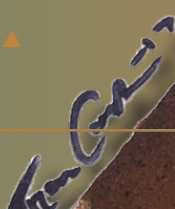
“Well, Lois and Andres are in their own room, but I'm okay. It was at a different hotel than the one we're at.”

“Well have you heard from them?”

“I tried but they're not answering. I'm pretty sure they didn't leave though.” The next morning, I got a text from Lois letting me know she and Andres were safe and that they had been asleep in their room the night before.

Later that week, I got a message. “Dude. Look at this shit.” My friend Abdul had sent me a link to an article “**Las Vegas shooter might have originally targeted Life is Beautiful Festival.**” My lungs were filling with air and letting it out, but I didn't feel like I was breathing when I read those words. I didn't want to believe it could be true, but it seemed that I'd only just avoided a serious personal tragedy by nothing more than chance. Again.

I felt guilty reading the reports. I had just been to Vegas the week before, for the Life Is Beautiful music festival. These people were just like me. They were there to enjoy the music and the city— to have a good time. And it didn't feel fair that I got to but they didn't. “Hey man,” I said to my roommate Enrico. “Don't you feel weird about how we barely missed that? I don't know how to feel about it.” ▲



THREE'S A PATTERN

BY RICKY BARAJAS



ART // TREVOR COOPERSMITH

MIRROR, MIRROR IN THE NIGHT

BY RICKY BARALAS

MIRROR, MIRROR IN THE NIGHT

WHEN COLD AND RESTLESS,
I ROSE FROM BED.

There was one night, a few ago,
When cold and restless, I rose from bed.
I pulled warm slippers onto my feet
And a hoodie over my head.

BUT WHEN I LOOKED INTO

I know my way around this place
So I didn't have to use the light—
But when I looked into the mirror,
I was struck with tremendous fright.

SOME SORT OF CREATURE I

There was a figure in the mirror,
Some sort of creature I think I saw.
I rubbed my eyes but it remained
So I stood, struck with awe.

I SAW THAT I WERE MOVE

I saw this figure move with me,
Though not as fluid as a shadow.
I stared at the face in search of life—
But found instead a mask of woe.

WITH ME

I felt its sadness deep in my gut.
I heard the words it could not say.
I saw clearly the pain it held.
I couldn't turn to look away.

I HEARD THE WORDS IT

I reached my hand out to touch it
To me, it slowly did the same.
Hands held apart by a thin wall of glass
I finally remembered this creature's name.

HANDS HELD APART BY A

There was no other present being.
No scary monster had appeared.
It was I that I was seeing,
It was I that I feared.

THIN WALL GLASS

IT WAS I THAT I FEARED.



MIRROR, MIRROR IN THE NIGHT

BY RICKY BARAJAS

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ART // YADIR CRUZ



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