

# UC Merced

## The Vernal Pool

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Two Poems

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Peer reviewed|Undergraduate

**SUSANA MADRIGAL**  
**TWO POEMS**



**THE VERNAL POOL**

**ISSUE SIX, FALL 2017**

## **As He Should**

I shook like a dashboard hula dancer on a semi-truck's dash...  
like a lost letter drifting downstream.

I didn't know what I would say.

He shone like a god when he stepped from his house.  
Our hug was as rich as coffee.

Lunch was delicious like a cup of hot chocolate  
on a rainy day, hearing the rain's drumming on leaves.

He recounted his trip abroad as if he'd been lost in the  
woods and survived on nothing but a handful of berries.

His laugh sounded like pages rustling in the wind.

Mystified, I stared at him as if he would disappear.

I felt like the Scooby-Doo to my Shaggy returned.

## Three Epistles: Floor Counselor, Psychiatric Clinic

2016.04.24

It would be nice to be swallowed by the ground.

Perhaps being a floor counselor could be rewarding. Prune juice. Blood on my uniform.

It intensifies the strolling around the facility, to see that a generation is being taken from their sanity.

I was terrified to walk on my own. I thought one of the patients would surprise me from behind and claw my eyes out.

She stared at me as if I was a specimen on display, and smiled.

Some patients introduced themselves to me.

One told me how he was dating so-and-so and he bought her a blue ring. A blue ring that she accidentally lost during their walk. I was volunteered to attend said walk. Between the beads of sweat and the paranoia slowly dissipating, she showed me her ring. Moving it and allowing it to catch the light.

They kicked sand up on the walk back to the facility. She exclaimed, "My ring! I've lost my ring!" I saw him crouch by her and reassure her that he will buy her a new one.

I smiled.

2016.05.13

Very high on freedom from finals, but coming down,

I've swum in the past forty-eight hours for so very many long hours.

The insanity is light today as the patients approached me.

They laughed and told me how their trip to Santa Cruz Boardwalk went. One of the patients said, "That was amazing because the rides were so tall," and the other agreed.

Sane.

"I'm going back to sleep after my medication. I'm too exhausted."

Another patient walked into the conversation. He wore a Pokemon shirt.

2016.07.15

I thought about hiding the clipboard and the pills from the patients.

He stood in line, leaned against the wall, and closed his eyes. He tried to catch a quick power nap before he needed to take his medication.

“Isn’t it your birthday today?” the nurse asked me. I stiffened.

Were the patients allowed to know my birthday?

“It’s your birthday? No way! Happy birthday,” a patient smiled at me. Her blue eyes shone in a soldier’s exhaustion.

“Hey, that’s cool,” another patient said as he shuffled a deck of cards in his hands.

I restrained myself from allowing them to give me a tight hug—as if it were a crime, and it was ours. It was a way of maintaining a keen sense of boundaries which if they were broken, the patients would lose me and I them. As each of them dragged up to the medication window, they gave me a quick side hug and wished me a happy birthday.

“I’m a cat!” one patient hissed as she walked away from the window, swung her hips and chased the rolling yarn.

Is that what it felt like to genuinely help someone feel better?

Love there only meant one thing: money. To most staff, the patients are only their props.

It just wasn't fair; how could you love someone when you didn't genuinely care for, and—unfortunately—you knew very little about? But I knew more.

I spent time talking to every patient. I made them laugh. I made them dance. I made them sing.

One patient told me how her parents were dead, and how she was the only member of her family still alive. Another told me that she was a social worker and she broke after handling an emotional case. The patients' emotional state was much more important than my own.

One patient told me, "You're my favorite floor counselor. You genuinely care about us, and I appreciate that a lot. Thank you." He made me cry that day, not out of sadness, but out of happiness.