

Text by Emily Wurst after Robert Irwin's "Two Running Violet V Forms"

Two Violet Running V Forms, Robert Irwin (1983)

Two Violet Running V Forms (restylized), Emily Wurst (2021)

My head rushes as I walk silently in the dark from Warren College to Revelle College. Every light has an aura, every horizon at a slant, as I bumble each step uphill. Honestly, hill might be an overstatement, it was more like a six-degree slant from one side of campus to the other. Beside me, the guy... David (?)... walked with an equally unsteady pace talking about Shiba Inu and how I *must* invest at least \$250 in it and I will have 10k by Winter Quarter. A laugh bubbled up from me, round and shiny from the tequila.

"Bro, what, crypto? I don't even have enough money to buy coffee."

"Just take out a loan, it's worth it. Trust me." I rolled my eyes.

"Nah bro, I don't have 250 on me. Maybe next quarter when my financial aid renews."

He started going off about how by then, it would already have blown up. But before he could keep finance bro-ing me, I saw the red light of the Target Sign. In the 1 am darkness it illuminated the brick of Library Walk and something about it spoke to my drunk-self.

I cut David off.

"First one to the eucalyptus grove wins," I shouted, taking-off. I could have been running quickly—probably not though. My boots thwacked hard on the ground as my legs pumped forward. After reaching a random middle point of the grove, I looked back. David was right behind me, panting, with his hands on his knees and looking up. His face was flushed and his breath came out harder than it should.

"What the fuck?" He said. He didn't look like he was having fun. I burst out laughing and

collapsed onto the bark floor of the eucalyptus grove.

“You’re so slow.” I said, tilting my face to the sky to see his dark form towering over me. “Weren’t you on, like, your high school track team, or something? I bet they weren’t very good.”

He scoffed. “We got second place in CIFs 2018 *and* 2019.” I laughed. He looked pissed but I didn’t care. I’m kinda mean like that.

I felt him lay next me as the wet bark crunched beneath his body. He sighed and his breath caressed my cheek in the darkness. I refused to turn my head, knowing the look in his eyes would be too intense for me to bare. Instead, I inhaled deeply, smelling the eucalyptus trees for the first time since lying down. The bark embedded itself into my loose hair and against the back of my thighs. Even though the trees seemed to have ghosts of themselves tripling in vision, I felt peaceful.

“It is beautiful tonight, don’t you think?” His breath was an intimate whisper against my ear but I still stared up at the ever-twirling sky. It was all dizzying.

“I’m so drunk I can’t even see the stars.” Weren’t these Shakespeare’s stars? Now, that’s a drunk thought. At the same moment I could hear my physics professor’s voice echo about nebulas and the birth and death of stars. I imagined what it would look like to see a white dwarf. David’s breath still touched my face.

Life felt like it was breathing and my vision twirled in circles as I thought about the sky I could not see. I thought about how the universe was expanding and the sky would eventually become stars that moved away from each other. No clusters of light but things spread apart. Uniform, like these invasive eucalyptus trees.

“Imagine what the sky will look like once everything has moved away from each other in the universe.” My words were wistful, but he interrupted the train of stars in my thoughts.

“Please don’t tell me you’re going to ask me if I think life is a simulation next. I know you’re not a STEM major but you don’t have to try and sound smart.”

Ouch. I picked up some bark and threw it at him.

After a few minutes sitting in silence, my ego stinging slightly, I tried again to provoke another interesting conversation. “Don’t you think it is crazy?”

“What’s crazy?”

“That this place...” I gesture upward, spreading my hands into the sky and letting the wind weave through my fingers. “This school. It will always have a piece of us. It takes so much every day. With classes, and clubs, and work, and stress, and the people we meet. I think we will always leave a part of ourselves here. Bury it. Like our childhood. Or something.” And like that, something sad fell within me like a closing door, cutting my sadness from the euphoria of being drunk. One hot tear slid down my temple but I wiped at it quickly, and I could feel the dirt from my sleeve fall to my face.

“I don’t know what you mean.” He said, and I could hear him turn to look up at the stars between the trees. The ones I knew that were there but I couldn’t see at the moment as my vision blurred further.

I wish he had wanted to talk about the sky with me. Maybe then I wouldn’t have gotten

sad.

“I don’t know, I guess.” I let my voice die, blinking rapidly, embarrassed. I didn’t want to get caught crying or seem weird. People hate sad and weird. I personally know how awkward it gets when some random, sort of adult, starts crying the first time you hang out with them. But not their fault, I guess. UCSD’s CAPs really doesn’t offer comprehensive mental health services.

David(?) (I think that’s his name) let the moment stay quiet. I don’t think he liked

hanging out with me that much.

I pointed up. In the darkness, my eyes had barely been able to make it out before but I realized what it was now. “Do you see that?” I asked. Twenty feet above us there were blue fences that ran through the eucalyptus grove. Two in total, both making Vs through the trees.

“You mean those blue things. I can’t really see them right now. It’s so dark, you think the campus could afford some light bulbs? I know what you’re talking about, though. They’re so ugly. Like rusted and dull.”

“Yeah. Do you know what they’re for?”

“What?”

“They’re giraffe catchers!” and I laughed. He clearly didn’t find my joke funny. I remember when a professor had told me that joke, I too hadn’t found it very funny. “Just kidding. They’re supposed to be some art piece. It is supposed to look like sky running through the eucalyptus grove.” He grunted an acknowledgement and something about how if it were art, the school should at least take care of it. I don’t know if I agreed with him. It was fitting. The school letting the sky rust and fade in the eucalyptus grove.

“Do you need feel the need to hate on everything, Mr. Counter-Culture?” I shot.

“I don’t *hate* on everything. Just stupid things, and UCSD is very stupid.” His voice carried a haughty authority that only a rich eighteen-year-old boy could have. Earn nothing, criticize everything. I lazed in my focus, willing my vision to stop spinning but it refused. Even drunk, though, I could see the moonlight shining through the grates of the Vs. Maybe David was right, the school should invest in some more outdoor lighting.

“I think it is kinda perfect, ya know?” I meant for the words to come out confidently but they were too fever bright for the dark night with this stranger. I remembered the sadness I had

just forgotten a moment ago and my voice grew quiet with my next words. “I feel like...it speaks to me.” He made a choking-laugh but I didn’t care. I knew I didn’t sound very smart but I also didn’t want to keep speaking in that sad little way.

What I didn’t want to voice aloud in the 1 am darkness to this slightly annoying boy is that, when you’re becoming an adult you don’t have anyone. Your parents aren’t with you, your friends are home, your roommates are weird—and the best thing to do on a Friday night is drink tequila with a stranger in Warren. When life is like that, well, you learn to not ask for much. Maybe with all the La Jolla fog and rain, maybe the blue California sky and its stars were too much to ask for. Too greedy. So, over the past months, I’ve learned. To love small. Extra crispy fries in the dining hall. A stranger’s company. A little piece of artificial sky. Rusted, faded, and barely visible in the night.

I didn’t think of David(?) again after that night. Over the following three years my trek across campus had me endlessly walk through the eucalyptus grove. But just like the art itself, the memory of that drunk night faded into nonexistence. However, on a Saturday afternoon in the spring of my senior year, a few friends and I decided we wanted to take graduation photos on Library Walk to commemorate our four years of work at UCSD.

The spring sun shined brightly in the late afternoon as we smiled and posed with our graduation hats. We moved down Library Walk, hoping to take photos without the backdrop of Geisel Library, when a familiar face popped into view.

“Hey! David, right?” I waved over a big smile plastered on my face. The excitement of photographing our near success made me giddy to talk to this man who was nearly a stranger. He

jogged over to me, also wearing a cap and gown. He looked taller, older, more filled out. It had been years since we last spoke.

“Congratulations!” I smiled at him. He gave me an awkward little wave. No hugs were exchanged.

“Congratulations to you too.” We talked about the weather, our photos, which ceremonies we planned on attending the following weekend and which we were skipping. He pointed over to his family who watched us speak, his little siblings running in circles on Library Walk.

“Hey, do you remember that night we hung out together? And we talked about the art in the eucalyptus grove?” He asked.

“Yeah I do. It is honestly such a faint memory, I was so drunk.”

“I think I remember you trying to finish a bottle of tequila. That was crazy.”

“Half of the bottle. You finished the other half.”

“Sure.” He rolled his eyes. “Well, anyway, I found out what the art is really there for.”

“They’re not giraffe catchers?” I asked with a playful grin.

He rolled his eyes. “Ha, no. Not quite. They’re more supposed to show how the sunlight plays through the sky of the eucalyptus grove. Kinda cool, no? It changes with the season.” He crossed his arms, not letting his comment die there. “But, I still think though the school should take better care of it.”

I gave him a small smile. “Yeah, they should take better care of a lot of things. Not our problem anymore though,” and I held up my graduation cap giving it a little shake.

“Yeah, I guess. Well I better get back to my family. Great seeing you, and congratulations, again.” He waved goodbye and jogged back to his family. But before he joined them he turned around, shouting back to me. “By the way, my name is Daniel!”

My face must have shown my mortification because even from fifty feet away I could hear his laughter.

“Who was that?” My friend came up behind me, my camera still in her hand.

“Just a friend,” she giggled and gave me a knowing wink. I rolled my eyes. As we walked through the eucalyptus grove toward Revelle College to take pictures by the fountain, I asked to take my camera back. My two friends walked ahead talking about where they wanted to bring their family out to eat after graduation. I stayed back, taking a few photos of the two V forms in the grove. I never noticed before how the sunlight was dancing through the grate of the rusted sky, but on this day, I would remember.