

The Remnant Archive



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Pooja Dua

MESSAGE FROM THE TEAM

Dear Readers,

As we publish our inaugural issue, it feels like the world has slowed down a bit. This is a joyous and celebratory moment for us as a team, trust us when we say that we're experiencing a sparse frenzy sitting in our home thinking about this issue and the journey that we've just gone through. It seems like it was only yesterday when we were working towards the establishment of The Remnant Archive.

This year has been like a wavering roller-coaster ride- unprecedented pandemic, worldwide protests against systematic political and social oppressions and frequent calamities. It's panoramic times like these that reflect ouroboros of reform and hardship amongst minorities and the outcasts around the world. We stand with our motive of voicing the marginalised and supporting revolutionary movements like Black Lives matter, Dalit lives matter and continue to uphold our philosophy of championing women, non-binary individuals, members of the LGBTQIA community, and BIPOC.



At the same time we feel that despite these harrowing occurrences, there is something that has been constant (and almost touched an all time high) - self-expression! People have been more vocal about their struggles than ever before. And this urge of the uninhibited mind to be non-compliant till it achieves its goals became an impetus for us to come up with TRA. We aimed to provide a platform where these voices could not just get amplified, but could also be preserved – in the form of art and literature. Which is why we were sure we wanted the name to be *The Remnant Archive- A depository of fallen memories and experiences*.

Readers, we hope as you begin to read this issue, you are reminded of certain stirring moments of your own life and reflect on the person they helped shape you to be. We hope you take triumph in accepting yourself, your flaws, your insecurities and redeem your identity from what the world determines.

At last, we'd like to thank our lovely contributors who trusted us with their work and especially everyone else who will further choose to encourage and support them. Thank you for keeping literature alive!

Warmly,
Team TRA



Edward Lee

Interview with Rohini Kejriwal (The Alipore Post)



Rohini Kejriwal is a writer, poet and a curator based out of Bangalore. She is always up for a good story, travel, strong coffee and the company of plants. She runs The Alipore Post, a curated newsletter and journal that promotes contemporary art, poetry, photography, music and all things intriguing.

What impetus made you come up with the name ‘The Alipore post’

I’m a huge admirer of the India Post, I used to write letters as child and Alipore was the place in West Bengal where we used to live. So it's an amalgamation of the two.

Running an acclaimed literary and arts journal, you must’ve come across an age-sex demographic. Would you say that the current times are making way for young women to venture into the field of arts and humanities more than before? If so, who are some of your favourite young women writers?

There are a lot of Indian poets coming up, which is amazing, and that’s happening across the age groups. I am finding poetry podcasts by Sunil Bhandari, who is 59, as well as someone as young as Meghna Prakash, who is constantly doing fabulous work.

So, there are definitely many young women and male poets in the scene. I also feel that social media is allowing people to express themselves more freely, and there are actually

people who want to read what is produced. It is not like the conventional publishing board, and it has its merits.

I feel like it is a very community-oriented kind of thing that is happening right now, with some structure of course, and it is really nice. So, everyone has their own aesthetic: someone is focusing on spoken word; people like me are working on art-lit poetry. So, it's good, and it's important to have such platforms which are helping in creating these particular niches for everyone.

We noticed on your personal doodling account that you love making ambiguous body figuratives- We are interested in understanding the creative aspect of it, where does the admiration for dandy and vague but equally human conception comes from?

I have been on this trip of doing these- creative mornings virtual field trips. It's the best thing that has happened to me during lockdown. I even gave one of these workshops, it was super fun! There was someone who did this water colour-meditation thing, and it was just like an art class with no judgement at all.

I think its just coming from this need to express, and playing with shapes – watching these forms emerge. There was one incident, when I tried a still portrait, and I was really surprised by the effects. So, I am happy with it: Somewhere it's instinctively there but it's a matter of fine tuning and sharpening that skill.

We noticed that TAP holds a strong substance over correlating poetry with art; We want to know that where does this inspiration for art comes from? Were you always so artistic as a child, or is it something that developed as you grew older?

Not really. I think I was happier reading, or playing games. However, I think over the last few years, I have been trying my hands at these inktober challenges. Even though it usually happens for like for a month, and then I forget about it, but then in that one month only I have 12-13 doodles ready, which I did.

I have had a linocut experimenting phase, where I just took a bunch of envelopes, and made linocuts, but it's just one stack now. But last year only, a friend got me an iPad and downloaded Procreate for me, and just like that experimenting with illustrations has changed my entire experience, as a personal experiment.

I like trying not to understand how a painting works, not the techniques, but the person behind it. I have always been fond of interviewing people myself, so there has been this need to pick someone's brain, and question that why didn't you put this here instead. So, I think I find the words in their artworks. That is how it basically correlates for me.

What are some of your favourite memories from The Alipore Post?

I think the events have been really fun.

Basically, the idea was to have a physical manifestation of this online space, and the main aim was to let learning be the main thing. The first one was just brilliant because I found this place called the Courtyard House, in Bangalore. It's in the suburbs, and is really just like a huge garden with an old structure of South Indian architecture in the middle. I wanted a trampoline to be there as well – for kids and adults, along with music, so that was a focus.

Even virtually there've been many special moments for me. The kind of people that I have met, they have just generally opened me up to the world. I could've been a very limited person, but here it's not even ambition exactly, but I just want to nurture this community, and it feels very natural now!

How did you come up with 'Chitthi Exchange'? Was it because you wrote letters as a child, or did some particular exchange fuel the inception of this idea?

I went to a boarding school so I was introduced to the form of letter writing very early in life. In fact a lot of times, it was the only mode of keeping in touch. We had a few leaves in each semester when we could all go home, and folks were allowed to visit once a semester, but apart from that it was just letters, and one hour of emailing per week. So, the thought of someone writing back to me and keeping in touch that inspired me to come up with Chitthi Exchange. Even The Alipore Post came partly from there – like a letter to the internet!

Do you think that art as an art form has the power to cause material change? Especially in the current scenario, considering the happenings that have been occurring in India, such as suppression of minorities.

Yes. As a form of expression and empowerment, it really encourages people to experiment with their zeal, which is actually more easy for arts which you can share with others. It is not necessarily about going to a gallery, you can literally make change on the street, just by holding a placard, saying what you want to say. It's definitely like you are representing a part of who you are, what you stand for through your creation; It doesn't have to be intended for that, but it always has to have that underlying message.

What are some future projects that you can tell us about?

I definitely want to create a pdf version of the website, or like a physical magazine, or maybe an e-magazine. I'd also love to pursue more collaborations and partnership.

There are other future projects as well, like The Alipore Post library, but it will still take years to happen. In addition to this, I definitely want to release my merchandise, I am making a bunch of tote bags with my 3-year-old niece, where she gets to colour over them, but I don't exactly know what I will do with them.

There's also this newsletter called 'This is My Newsletter' which has been initiated by me, but every Sunday ask a different person to curate a newsletter and send it across. Currently we have around 500 subscribers for that which is really interesting, because honestly, I didn't expect it to happen, because you don't know who is going to write to you. So, through this I have also observed that there are always people there to accept such ideas which you aren't very sure about, but it's also okay to take those chances and have fun with the process along the way!

Interview with Meghna Prakash



*Meghna is a published poet who has been writing as a freelance journalist for various publications such as Swaddle, Indian Express, etc. She is the founder of **Poetry Dialogue** and an advocate for mental health.*

What impetus made you come up with the name “trigger warning”?

I am a survivor. I find a lot of things in my world triggering; things that other people don't put second thought into. So, I have written these poems from a really personal space of catharsis, of somewhat processing my trauma. That's why I came up with the name *trigger warning*.

With this book it's like you are entering into my world, you are going to see what triggers me, you are going to experience this roller coaster with me. So, that's basically how the name came about. I am instinctive like that, and when the name happened, it just felt really right, like yes! – this is the book, this is me, I am navigating my journey with mental health through it, and this is my safe space of thoughts. But this book can be triggering for a lot of people because I am graphic in the way I write. So, it is also sort of a warning.

We've noticed that you're a huge advocate for mental health, how do you think it correlates with you writing poetry since re-living certain experiences while transcending them into your art can act like a trigger itself?

Definitely. It can be very, very triggering, but I think people process trauma differently.

I have written a trauma guidebook very recently, with Kirthi Jayakumar of The Gender Security Project, we released it a few days ago. It's a free guidebook, and it is going to be

translated into different languages. So, I have interviewed multiple survivors to know their perspective, and what all triggers them, and to understand how they process trauma.

As for me, I have been writing poetry my whole life – since I was 4-5 years old. So, it comes to me very naturally. Also, at times to process some things, I write them. Then everything starts making sense, because I realise how I feel about things. So, for me, it acts like a healing process.

I have also done poetry performances a lot of times, and people have cried, and they have told me that they relate to my experiences, and that means so much to me, because that's the whole point of art, right? You can talk about difficult subjects, and you can connect with others while doing it.

One of the leaps in the poetry community in recent years has been of instrumentalizing trauma- Do you feel that there was ever a pressure to out your experiences of abuse or to inculcate them in your writings just because they would act like a relatability factor?

Yes! When I was younger, and the performance scheme had just started out, I had noticed that need for inculcating trauma and I did not want to fall into that trap.

For me it's not about performances; I write for myself. Earlier, I also believed that I had to be sad to write, or I had to be in a bad mental state to write. But I realised that's not it. You don't have to be high; you don't have to be drunk; you don't even have to be in a bad mental space to create art. That's a misconception, and that's definitely not a healthy way to do it. At the end of the day, the more aware you are, the more energy you will have to put into your art and make it better – without having any feelings of self-doubt crush you.

I have also always personally felt that I write, because I must write; there's just no other way, and it makes me really happy. (And, to know that people like what I create means the world to me, but I won't count on it.) I just want to create because I want to talk about things, because I feel strongly about a certain issue, and I want to create something that matters. I want my audience to engage with me; I want them to question me, or ask me why are your views this way on Kashmir. I want to have that conversation with them, and I think that it's very important that we can open up for such conversations and debate. That's what I like doing with my poems. I like inciting people. I like getting reactions out of them, but I don't write my poems specifically for them.

What are your views on art as a political expression? Especially considering the recent cases of police brutality and minority suppression in both India and the west, do you think poetry as an art form has the power to cause material change?

I think if you go back and look into the history of poetry, it started as spoken word art before it became a written practice – at least in India. A lot of time it is seen as a way to create awareness around issues, we have always been doing that. It's just that now, when we are living in such difficult political times, where censorship of freedom of speech is at an all time high.

We live in a democracy where poets are arrested for performing political poems. There's definitely huge suppression right now, and I think this is a very important time for minority voices as well, to speak up. But at the same time, the majority also needs to talk about their issues, and other issues, because they have the advantage here. They should use this privilege to put their point across. It's really important now, more than ever.

Your book is described to be confessional, personal and deeply rooted in childhood trauma and abusive relationships. As a poet, how was the journey to find your own unique identity, accept your trauma and create art through those embellishments like?

It is very interesting to put together a collection of poems. Through this book, I was also seeing how my trauma journey has been changing over a period of time. I was able to map how it is changing, and how I was processing the same trauma at the start, and compared how the process has changed by the end of the book.

Talking about poetry, I'll say I live on poetry. Even with Poetry Dialogue we curate poems for people daily; we create publishing opportunities for people, and I want to see so many people published. I want to see a lot of Indian names in international journals.

How has the journey of coming up with Poetry Dialogue been like?

It was a little scary initially, because we didn't know how to post; we didn't know how to share people's works in the right way. It took time to figure all of that out. But once Poetry Dialogue set into motion, it's been growing since then.

I also did a little festival for everybody to come together. We had a great audience from all around India perform, and it's been a phenomenal journey.

Language is extremely malleable and when writing about personal trauma, it's imperative to weave your pieces in a sensitive, more careful manner- what tips

would you like to give young poets who might be interested in writing about their own experiences?

I don't think I want to give people tips for writing about their own experiences, because ultimately everybody has to find their own voice, and their own style to that works for them. At the end of the day, it's just about being honest, reading a lot of poetry, and above all writing a lot of poetry. Other than that, there's no magic; there's nothing beyond that.

Other than this, I think it's also very important to keep sending your poetry to journals. Like, my goal is 100 rejections a year, and when I get 100 rejections, I also get good acceptances. And, with every rejection I learn, I grow. I get to know that this poem is still a baby, and I need to nurture it more, solidify the particular poem. So, you either need to have a dialogue with yourself, or with a group of editors, because the idea is to work on the poem, and then send it to journals. That's just how I look at my poetry, and so I don't want to tell people how to write or how to craft their voice.

Lastly, we would like to know some of your favourite poems, or poets who continue to inspire you.

I am currently obsessing about Anna Akhmatova, she's a Russian revolutionary poet. I am also reading Arundhati Subramaniam, Kamala Das, Mahmoud Darwish.

Interview with Irshaad



Irshaad Poetry is an anthology of poetry. Their aim is to inculcate a culture of poetry and reading among their followers and everyone who comes across their page.

You both are poets yourself, when you chose a poem to post on Irshaad, what makes you think that this is the one?

Whenever a poem makes us feel or think, we know it is right. Moreover, if it makes us wonder or question ourselves or the world, we know it's the one.

It's like what Emily Dickinson said: "If I physically feel like the top of my head has been taken off, then I know that it is poetry."

Do you think poetry as an art form in India is transcending into becoming a means of performative activism?

We do not think so. We do believe that some of the space that poetry occupies as a form of protest has been appropriated for social media validation but poetry as a medium of protest will always persevere. And it has been so since times immemorial, whether it's in wars for independence or rebellion against fascism, poetry always has been an expression of the society and even if some people do partake in it as a means of performative activism, it doesn't take away from its overall importance of the art form.

How do you think the accessibility of poems over the internet have affected their actual beauty? Is it more of a boon or a bane? Have the traditional poetry recitals taken a backseat at status quo?

The internet and the issue of accessibility have been boons to poets and poetry-lovers, we feel. Similar to how slam poetry as a movement sought to bring poetry to the masses, the internet and the variety of platforms have enabled a movement that is the poetic equivalent of globalisation. Poets and readers from all over the world are able to connect and appreciate poetry together and that is beautiful.

While there may be some people who alter the terms of poetry and its beauty for social media validation, that is a con that is outweighed by the pros. Moreover, if a reader finds solidarity and beauty in a poem, the subjectivity of their opinions must be respected, as long as the poem in question isn't disrespectful.

Traditional poetry recitals have certainly taken a backseat due to the status quo. However, efforts have been made to revive interest in them and the internet has been a great tool in this process. It's been wonderful to witness, even though it is sad that such steps have to be taken.

Do you think the minorities are appropriately and sufficiently represented through art in our country?

The representation of minorities remains an issue that has to be addressed by the stakeholders of the artistic scene in India. While there are voices who represent their communities, these voices have not been able to find their way into the mainstream. Hence, their art and the representation they aim towards have not been paid proper attention to.

When we search for poetry to read and post, we struggle in finding poems by Dalit writers, or other minorities, and we are pretty sure the reason isn't a lack of artistic expressions from the community.

These voices and their work should be highlighted and receive due attention. Until that happens, the minorities shall remain under-represented in our countries art.

If we map the trends in contemporary South Asian literature, perhaps the most noticeable feature would be the emergence of a huge number of women authors. How do you feel about women writers shattering the 'home and hearth' stereotype, and what do you think is the way forward?

has been heart-warming. And sometimes heart-rending. It is not just about shattering the 'home and hearth' stereotype but also of developing a newer and more nuanced understanding of the stereotype.

We think that the way forward is for greater emergence of these women writers and for their art, their voices, and their perspectives to receive the attention and appreciation that have been accorded to their male contemporaries.

Moreover, we also believe that there is no fair way forward without due representation to LGBTQ+ voices. It is only when people of all sexualities or no sexualities and people of all genders or no genders find their space in literature and other forms of art that these spaces would be considered an optimal representation of the people.

A poetry book that you would recommend to beginners, so that they can understand the essence of poetry?

Raj- I mostly read poems in singularity but I do have a book of Emily Dickinson's poems which I love and almost worship! Reading a poet's anthology is like visiting parts of their lives on a special tour, it's amazing.

Isha- It's pretty much the same with me! However, there were books I wish I'd read when I'd started out- Selected Poems by Kamala Das, 60 Indian Poets, Selected Poems, Gulzar, and the complete poems of Emily Dickinson.

How do you as poets come up with the theme of a poem? Is the process organic or is there a method/structural process you follow?

Raj- I do not follow any process or structure. Sometimes, a topic stirs me so much that I absolutely have to write about it. Other times, a line comes to me and I know that I have to try and build a poem around it.

Isha- Try as I might, I cannot write on cue. However, I'm always on the lookout for a word, or a sentence, which I might be able to turn into a metaphor. Once I find that, I write the first sentence of the poem I'm writing- and let myself go wherever the words take me, for a couple of stanzas or so. That helps me realise the direction which I want to take with the poem, after which I'm able to write it further in a more structured manner. When I conclude my poems, I usually try to connect the metaphor I used in the first sentence, to the last sentence of the piece, so it might help make sense of the crazy. That's pretty much it, haha!



WILL WE EVER TOUCH AGAIN?

Temidayo Jacob

"...humans are struggling to ignore
thousands of years of bio-social convention
and avoid touching another."

— BBC News (6 May, 2020)

i cannot touch myself [anymore]
 — say, i'm trying to forget how to
make love to myself in my closet.
 this wasn't how i started. i mean,
i have chronicles of me touching in
 open places — at my father's garden
when my neighbour's daughter made
 me touch her petals. in the field when
i touched a boy on his lips with mine
 while trying not to fall for him. now,
i can't even get to touch people anymore
 — people can't touch people anymore.
these days, to touch means to kill or
 to get killed. even god doesn't want to
touch people with his healing hands
 — perhaps he doesn't want to be infected
by a virus that has left his temples deserted.
 i wonder if he will ever be able to touch us
again — i really miss those days when i
 could touch my member in church as the
choir sings impassioned hymns while
 trying so hard not to nut into my church robe.

Temidayo Jacob is a Sociologist who writes from the North Central part of Nigeria. He is passionate about espousing the conflict between the individual and the society. He is the Creative Director of foenix press. He is also the author of Beauty Of Ashes. Temidayo's work has appeared and is forthcoming on Rattle, Outcast Magazine, Lucent Dreaming, The Temz Review, Peeking Cat Poetry, Kissing Dynamite, and others. You can reach him on Twitter @BoyUntouched.

AN INEVITABLY QUEER READING OF FAIZ

Banah Ghadbian

Let me get this straight,
I ask Baba. She's singing as a woman
as a man yearning for a woman
who is a brown skinned beauty, and the
beauty of all brown skinned women?
Yes, isn't it obvious, he says.
Only Fairuz' voice could translate
his desire. Only her yearning could
call back the night. I imagine Fairuz
is singing to me, and I write her poems
only a man could recite.

Banah Ghadbian is a nonbinary queer Syrian writer (pronouns: zhe, she, they) published in *As/Us: Queer Issue*, *Sukoon*, an Arab-themed literary magazine, *Aunt Chloe: a Journal for Artful Candor*, and *Passage & Place: A Print Anthology on Home*, and *Acting Up: Queer in the New Century Anthology*. Banah was a finalist in the *Feminist Wire's* poetry competition and won the *Hamsa: Dream Deferred Essay Contest* for Civil Rights in the Middle East. A jewelry artist and poet, zhe is currently a PhD Candidate at UC San Diego on a Mellon Fellowship working on zir dissertation about Syrian women's creative work in revolution and war.





Jacy Zhang

THREE YOU'S

Peter Gutierrez

1.

there is nothing so tender as the memory of tenderness; I know this and yet the memories supplant any reality, any weight still felt in my arms from the small, fated bundle you once were: the size of a cushion, the length of a forearm, stretched out to gulp at the heated plastic thing that was also one of your parents

in the seasons since, I hope it was the energy of my decline that fed you, that helpedÂ you outgrow me; I am the small one now, shrinking steadily from the shadowÂ of your future

2.

there is nothing to say about it, that breadth of time, about all those years when we spoke every day; my mouth opens and the interior emptiness exits, multiplies

wants to speak of the fine, expansive moments, of the early sound of joy galloping toward us, but there is only ungraceful aging, a reflexive huddling together, a scattering of mere pleasantness that never outweighed its opposite

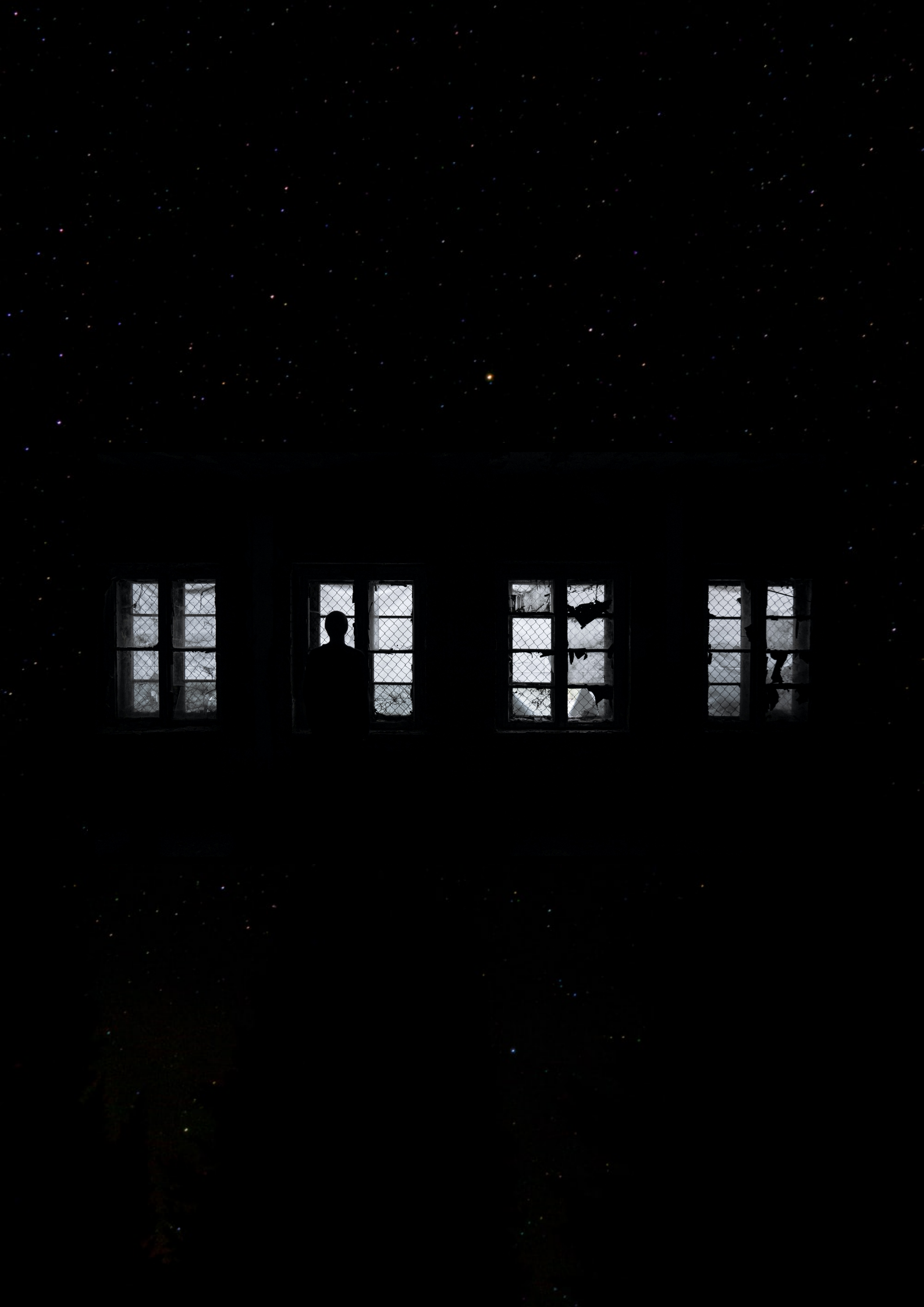
I sit on the sofa where you lay all those nights watching tv; the furniture doesn't remember you, and I almost as little; I wish I could, though; and feel some familiar pain about your absence; yet all there is, is absence, unadorned and unanguished, a complete flowering of deletion

3.

there is nothing left of you at all save the two urns atop the bookcase- I have carried them close to me with every change of apartment and they always pretend to watch over the premises; but it's good that ashes lack eyes, a blessing that you've never seen what I've become after your own end

I hope only that someone finds you amidst the ruins, perhaps exalts my remains to your level

Peter Gutierrez is a writer and artist from New Jersey. Recent poetry and fiction publications include *Alien Buddha*, *Cavity*, *The Dark*, *Expat Press*, *Gone Lawn*, *Grody Mag*, *Ligeia*, *Lxminxl*, *Misery Tourism*, and *Rejection Letters*. You can find him on Twitter @suddenlyquiet.



TWO POEMS

Bri Bruce

When I Die

When I die, burn my body. I hope to
leave with you—
among other things—a sort of fury,
enough for you to
imagine me beating the ground with my
fists, igniting.

Miracle

Tell me what brings you
to your knees, what becomes of us.
Your fears.

I can tell you in my own words
what we are: we are many things—
small humors, superstitions.

It must also be said
there can be beauty in anguish—
in yours and in mine.

Each of us our own poetry,
a language of wounds, and of dawn,
and the color blue.

And aren't we, after all,
the miracle of a long-ago mess
as though by accident?

What more need we be?

Award-winning author and Pushcart Prize nominee, California poet **Bri Bruce** has been deemed the "heiress of Mary Oliver." With a bachelor's degree in literature and creative writing from the University of California at Santa Cruz, her work has appeared in dozens of anthologies, magazines, and literary publications, including *The Sun Magazine*, *Northwind Magazine*, *The Soundings Review*, and *The Monterey Poetry Review*, among others. Most recently the recipient of the Pushpen Press Pendant Prize for Poetry, Bruce is the author of three books, *The Weight of Snow*, *28 Days of Solitude*, and *The Starling's Song*. Her much praised debut collection *The Weight of Snow* was the 2014 International Book Awards poetry category finalist and the 2014 USA Best Book Awards poetry category finalist.

ODE TO MY DEAD BROTHER WHOM I NEVER MET

Praise Osawaru

when mother told me another boy
sucked her tits before me,
like daisies, gladness sprouted in my heart.
but the tale's end bore an excavating chill
& it burrowed gloom in my body.
you never walked the earth with your feet—
you returned as you came:
crying / crawling back to the heavens.
there are no photos of you,
so I imagine you as a star in the sky,
burning in darkness & light.
some nights, I swear, I hear your voice,
like the chirping of a bird,
& it fills my ears with a breed of melody.
the wind fondles my skin & I picture your hands.
this world is a knife plunging bodies with worries /
this world is a city devoid of copious sunshine.
it is undeserving of your blinding lights.
mother imagines you're alive elsewhere;
where happiness blooms like an untamed fire.
breathe, brother, you're alive in our hearts.

Praise Osawaru is a Nigerian writer, (performance) poet, and an undergrad at the University of Benin, Nigeria. His works have appeared or are forthcoming in *African Writer*, *Afritondo*, *Analogies & Allegories Literary Magazine*, *Green Black Tales*, *Perhappened Mag*, *Praxis Magazine*, *Serotonin*, and elsewhere. He was long listed for the African Writers Award 2019 and shortlisted for the 2019 Kreative Diadem Writing Contest. A lover of art and a film fanatic, you can find him on twitter: @wordsmithpraise.



TÅRER I SJØEN

Rox Kasun

the dying breath of the god, sun,
clings tightly to what's left of friday.
i see you. the remaining clouds are dipped in your light ink.
heat pulses through our skin,
and i remember what it's like to be home.
running through empty streets to the sound of her laughter
and the songs we sing, pink glitter in our hair,
innocent we dance underneath thor's mighty sky.
no storms come for us – it's calm on aker brygge.
and if i close my eyes, time travel,
we're painting pictures in the park. we're dancing free -
valhalla is a place on earth tonight.
smoky alleyways belong to us and we belong to oslo,
tears of joy washing colour down our cheeks,
to our lips. lips that kiss, lips that lead us
into the homes of strangers. learning lines with cheap champagne.
balcony cigarettes, before god returns and
flicks orange, red, golden beams across the horizon.
it isn't over; how could it be? let us sleep when london comes into view -
- when reality strikes.
let us be here. we have time.
i'll meet you downstairs - a shot for the road?
one last drink to send us on our endless, limitless, love-struck dance home.
hand in hand.
tonight, we dance in heaven.

Rox is a queer poet based in England. They can be found @roxkashun on Twitter.



NO MATTER HOW MUCH RAIN FALLS

Antoni Ooto

you will be all right—
recall spring,

while nature watches a waiting field;
all her secrets soaking faithfully,

nudging a belief in growth,
in peace, sowing trust,

leaning forward;

like a monk dropping seeds
while keeping that final vow

Antoni Ooto is an internationally published poet and flash fiction writer. Also a well-known for his abstract expressionist art, Antoni now adds his voice in poetry. A study of many poets has opened and offered him a new means of self-expression. He has been published in Amethyst Review, The BeZine, The Poet Magazine, The Active Muse, Young Ravens Literary Review, and many others.

He lives and works in upstate New York with his wife poet/storyteller, Judy DeCroce.



I KNOW WHY THE GHOSTS CRY

Ismim Putera

I know why the ghosts
cry:

they cry
because the graves are too shallow
that they hear every gossip we spread about them

what they do is mostly to pull out the nail
from the oblong coffin
and crawl out on all fours

the ghost who laughs
the hardest at the funeral
cry the hardest at night

and we assume they cry because
they're too afraid to live
or too afraid to die again

hell no!
they cry because we
made them cry like us

we cry like half-crazy banshee
screeching and groaning and grunting
they can see the bones in our throat

i know why the ghosts
cry: the graves are too shallow
and the dirt is too sweet-scented

Ismim Putera (he/him) is a poet and writer from Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo. His work has appeared in several online magazines such as Anak Sastra, Ghost Heart Literary, River Bird Magazine, Prismatic and forthcoming in Omelette magazine.

DENOUNCING CATACLYSMS

Rabiu Temidayo

At the end of this cul de sac, in
Àjètùmòbí Street
Spring equinox sits above the hovels,
flags about the church banner attached
to rusted rails, on rails the doves,
The intersection where the hooligans are
stationed,
Lay on the bare floor and repeat
Yellow House,
Love in a time of Socialism.
Out eleven playing street football,
eleven
of them spread in the hot afternoon
on the tattered road, rusted placards,
57 degrees north.
Supermarkets where who wins the trophy
loses. Who suffers the host, Now.
To live in the ditch is to clamber
up through the cobwebs, to believe
this world, this superstition, ended now.
One world ends, one world begins.
Uneven reality paralleled into one.
Paragraph one
under a pile of shoes needs submission.
It is run mad. In the morning
the grumblers complain about death and dying.
Tumblers break to the sound of the retribution
and tungsten lamps fall.
Bluetooth speakers and jeans as deterrence
for territorial gang of boys.
A coven of witches with
plausible deniability to set me straight.
Apparitions appearing and disappearing.
From the clothesline. Denouncing cataclysms.
Everyone you meet in this ragged
town sit on blistered benches at noon
and complain
about dying,
and it is teleportation.
Fate-mongers die every night in Àjètùmòbí

Under the blistered starry skies where
my future or past calls
I set aside pool of tears, I set aside
Thursdays for César Vallejo.
I came out of the basement of the church,
reeking of the holy ghost.
Read chapter 3 on Malachi, to fall in love
and for the moon, I set lamp on for Her's
playing masque to something obscure.

Rabiu writes critical essays. He is in school of psychology, he studies art and photography. He reads for Tinderbox Journal. He published Daylight (2018), on Ghost City Press. He is published on Ric Journal, Cosmopolitan Hotel, Selcouth Station, Bone and Ink etc. Twitter: @rabiutemidayo



DISTANCE

Frank Karioris

I know that I know it in my feet,
in my back & hands.

That it has bent my tongue
& hit my skin;

that its struck me on cool alleyway
a lane split asunder
with redbrick splinters & laughing windows.

There is a bottle cap
I've held onto for ten years,
its rust beginning to crumble

on the shelf, cliff warped

along the axis of scars on my hands.

4th generation immigrant,
movers, We're found places,

my father seeking to move from well
to well-off,

while my grandparents
who went by foreign names
went from Greek
to Greek-American.

Their parents – movers of the first order –

the only bartender, barowner, baroness
who didn't take anything
from anyone

& moved barrels from Miller
pulled direct
off the truck from the brewery
with all
the Germans & Poles.

I know it like I know

broken soled shoes,
waterlogged &

mementos of lovers
left behind turned into poetry

as the only way to process

something unfinished.

The feeling of being so far from

even the idea of home

you cry the first week
but still can't pick up a phone
to call, until

they contact the landlord
who sends their Eastern European
wife
to tell you to call your parents.

I know it the way
you get to know those
who work around your day,
those who make fresh bread
in a tandoori oven

who, while not speaking your language,
always smiles to ask about your day,

or the one who, when you tell them –
via a friend translating –

that you're leaving & love them,
they look sad in the way ...

Frank G. Karioris (he/they/him/them) is a writer and educator based in Pittsburgh whose writing addresses issues of friendship, masculinity, and gender. Their work has appeared or is forthcoming in Pittsburgh Poetry Journal, Collective Unrest, Maudlin House, Sooth Swarm Journal, and Crêpe & Penn amongst others. They are a regular contributor to Headline Poetry & Press.
Twitter: @FrankGKarioris

INSIDE

Hiram Larew

Grass is gay
 in such fields of lambs
As are arms stretched out. His.
And whenever water gurgles over rocks
 that's gay as well.
Or think of shirts that let sun in.
 In the back. Yes, his.
Clouds can be very gay, too.
And so are starlings
peppery up in that tree. So him.
They are all almost as gay as railroad tracks at dusk
or fading whistles.
Almost as gay as the grinning looks inside of eyes.

The first time that I felt what was supposed to be
 was in a meadow. Him.
 When suddenly it seemed that time was almost too grateful.
When all the suns felt wholly new --
It was a very inside outside and
wondrous thing. Him.
And after that I never seemed to stretch, whistle
 or roll up any kind of sleeves
or eat a sandwich in quite
the same way.

Larew's poems have appeared widely and have been nominated for several Pushcart prizes. His Poetry X Hunger initiative is bringing poets and poetry to the anti-hunger cause (PoetryXHunger.com). On Facebook at Hiram Larew, Poet.

ACT

Grace Alice

the act of composing words and worlds into corporeal beings
still induces agony and yet i urge myself on
pressing fingers to my temples in hopes
that the ebb and flow
of remorse which i nurture still
will recede.
the careful construct of my
sanctuary which protects
what i have nearly lost
is a shrine of bandage and barbed wire
wisps of half-formed thoughts and bleached bones
if this emptiness is what it feels like
to become one of the cured few, i will
choose to befriend the ghosts instead –
if they let me feel,
acquaint with them like with old companions.
how many times have i tried to break our eternal bond?
each time
i sever our separation,
it ends in crawling
back
into their open arms
in the seclusion of the vault of our memories
i would rather be executed by what i cherish than a carcass ravaged by fear.

Grace Alice Evans (she/they) is a LGBTQ+, mixed-heritage poet, writer, sound/visual artist and survivor, whose work explores living with mental illness, trauma, recovery, and the dichotomy between the inner and outer worlds. Grace's social media handle is @gracealiceevans.





Edward Lee

NUCLEAR FAMILIES ARE WAR (THE CHRONOLOGY).

Ejio Elizabeth Edward

The dinner table which holds the number four together by duty hosts six seated around it. Somehow this family keeps increasing by spite. It is our last supper for the year & we are having nothing but roasted lamb. Father shares the grace like he is Santa Claus on Christmas Eve. A hand slides through my skirt. Father sleeps with our neighbor's husband. He is gay. Our fair skinned niece sleeps with my eldest brother. Her smile identifies like the joker, she winks at him. Our maid holds the last child: She does a job of opening up his zip, sucking innocence out of him, whilst mother is away with the gardener.... The next day is Sunday Service. We grace the front row. Father who is the catechist says: "God forgives us of our sin" A sigh sweeps through the front row. It's from my mother's lip, At dusk the ability of a sixteen year old is to achieve orgasm. Escape from this chaos called home with dancing magic fingers.

II. Our dead ones are Raisins.

Five years after Mother dies ontop of her Gardener lovers body. Somehow father is able to bury her & he performs this with the strictness of a man whose life can not go wrong. he tells us : " mother is Raisin". I am still trying to figure out whom he was lying to? Himself. Or Us.

My father finds a moldy dish under my brothers bed.

How long have they been there? My brother answers; Somewhere between five years and not breathing. The day my elder brother leaves is the day heaven begins to drop from the sky And somehow hell is able to meet it half way there.

iii . The insides of a lamb intestines are often the sweetest offerings .

I like to think mother looks from above or maybe below Indifferent about our family. I mean what kind of mother would watch her daughter raped and see the blood flow : Mixed with palm oil in her kitchen. My father dies

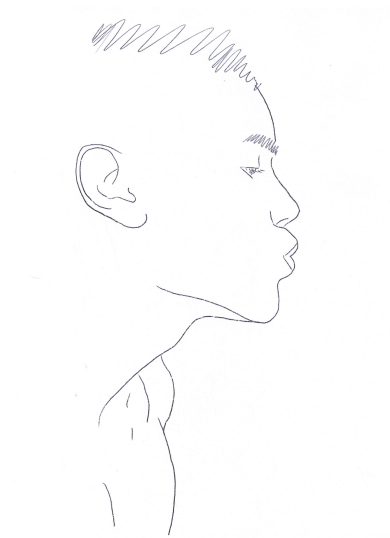
while I am writing a poem about him dying, Somehow I have been able to conjure the future to present . My brother comes back to stuff Our

fathers intestine inside the fridge. The house maid mistakes it for meat. We gather around the table and have dinner. Brother

seats on fathers chair: Ask's me to share the grace, No food ever looked so delicious like fathers intestine, To hell with the grace I say, Gulping down the food,

The future never looked so bright.

Ejiro Elizabeth Edward is a passionate lover of the arts. A writer of queer poetry, she finds poetry as a deep means of sharing her fears and every day trials. She has been published on some online magazine and shortlisted for the dark juices anthology. When she's not busy writing, she loves to read and travel.



Artwork by Nick Maynard

TWO POEMS

Trishita Das

an introduction

(after Kamala Das)

what it's like to be a brown girl?

an afterthought

a body/ is all they see/ i am the weight of my breasts/ the shape of my waist/ the burden of every eye that follows me/ i am the river of blood that birthed the world/ every time they say woman/what they mean is womb.

a whisper in the dark

conversations held entirely in furtive glances and raised eyebrows/ i am the compilation of a millennia of tongues/ saying girls should be seen and not heard/ i am a wrong answer that someone tried to erase but couldn't/ abandoned and half scribbled over/ i am all those words that are whispered: secret/ taboo/ she.

sacred/sinful

worship at my feet/ for they call me devi/ as long as i am untouched/ place me on a pedestal built on preconceived prejudice/ and paternal condescension/ and when my music begins to grow wild/ they shake it out of me until i shatter/ i have been everything holy/ and everything sacrilegious/ call me eve/ shakti/ medusa/ parvati/ kali.

nimbu paani

sharp and acid/ even diluted i cut through every stone/ i am the distilled rage of every silenced woman/ i burn quiet and furious/ the salt-laced symphony that brings a mountain to its knees/ and just cold enough to pour down the summer's throat.

someone else's mouth

tell me what to say/ or think/ or feel/ or exist/ tell me how/ tell me all about your shock and horror/ the rules you want me to follow/ the definitions i need to squeeze into/ tell me how i must become a foreigner to myself to be familiar to you/ and i will tell you what i see when i look in the mirror/ i will tell you that i call myself i.

stone gods

at night, when the house is asleep:
one flickering yellow bulb to keep them company.

if tomorrow starts without me
accept my apology, i was never good at goodbyes.
i love the feeling of want that comes out of incompleteness;
i leave everything unfinished, even time.
i wanted courage more than anything else,
but all i had was rage and it bubbled
out of me, and perhaps i want to go back.
perhaps i want to touch today again with trembling hands.
perhaps

perhaps

perhaps
longing is the shape of my mother
leaving lights on in the dark for deities
she doesn't believe in. perhaps tomorrow
she will leave a light on for me.

Trishita Das is a writer from Mumbai, India. Her poems celebrate and archive the magic of ordinary life. Her work has been published in journals and platforms including Ayaskala, Plum Tree Tavern, Ang(st) Magazine, and Free Verse Revolution. She also enjoys culinary experiments, fluffy dogs, and bathroom singing.



INSTRUCTIONS FOR APOTHEOSIS

MP Armstrong

when you watch the renaissance start over every morning through your eyeglasses
but cannot find a soul to see it with you, you will have to deify the trees yourself.
kneel at the sink. pray to the alarm clock. pull the oil-paint sheen off your heart and
drape it back across the world, a banner declaring everyone is welcome at the altar
of your roommate, who sleeps arms out, Jesus on the memory foam cross, and has
already forgiven them, no matter what half-twisted sketches lie beneath the acrylic
of your classmate, a modern botticelli's muse in front of a library bookshelf
contrapposto afraid to touch bare soles or souls to the polluted ground
of the muses, who have given you a model of how to worship the entire world despite
the weight of everything resting on their backs, wracked atlases
of Michelangelo and Eliot, handing down a heritage soaked with turpentine and poison,
stabbed through with existential hurt
of Lenin and Lennon come to you in a dream to remind you that you live in the garden
of eden and do not let anyone tell you otherwise do not let them
tell you anything beyond bite the apple and do not be afraid
of the holy itinerants, declaring that we spiders dangle over a pit, suspended on
gossamer threads; twitching over a tangled flame-mess and dripping with the molten
gaze of almighty hatred
of the idea that god abhors us, in all his wisdom, because we do not care whether he is
real or not, and we will scream and say prayers to whatever works no matter what the
answer is
of existing plainly, existing to provoke the coffins and cars and clergy, and to remember
itinerants are impermanent and cannot be trusted
like anything can be trusted the more books you open.

MP Armstrong is a disabled queer writer from Ohio, studying English and history at Kent State University. Their work appears or is forthcoming in *Perhappened*, *Prismatica Magazine*, and *Hominum Journal*, among others, and their debut chapbook, *who lives like this for such a cheap price?*, is forthcoming this winter from Flower Press. Find them online @mpawrites and at mpawrites.wixsite.com/website. Their handles on both Instagram and Twitter are @mpawrites!



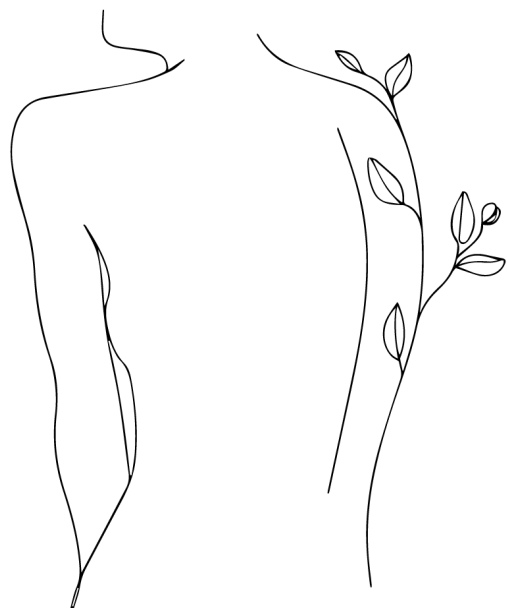
Martina Rimbaldo

15000 DAYS

Kate Garrett

My son says I have fifteen thousand days left on earth. It's an estimate. Maybe it'll be reduced to ten, to one thousand, to nine thousand two hundred and four. I've never been sure about making plans for so much time when it might be so little. I hesitate over the increments in between. If tomorrow I walk alone to touch the city living in freezing November, exchanging small talk with a stranger, big talk with a friend, drinking a forgotten latte – I will not have wasted one of the ten days, one of the fifteen thousand. I don't know where to go after this blue Earth but I've imagined a dozen places. I've wondered if we return to nothing, such an easy choice when each one of the fifteen thousand days has felt like a brick around my body – back when their number was twenty thousand – and I not only tried to imagine nothing but wished for it. These days the thoughts of the other dozen afterlives push in and I know there will not be any rest, not for the wicked or the good. There will always be something. I climb over the moments, each of the days uncounted that might add up to ten or nine thousand two hundred and four, that might add up to my son's fifteen thousand, remembering throwaway smiles, halogen blur, cobblestone words.

Kate Garrett is a writer, editor, and mama of five who is obsessed with history and folklore. Her work is widely published, and has been nominated for Best of the Net and the Pushcart Prize, as well as longlisted for a Saboteur Award. She is the author of a handful of books, and the next one - a historical verse novella, *Hart & Halfpenny* - will be published in March 2021 by TwistiT Press. Born and raised in rural southern Ohio, USA, Kate moved to the UK in 1999, where she still lives - currently in an off-duty vicarage on the Welsh border.





Pooja Dua

AN ACCUMULATED LIFE

Judy Decroce

A mind seeking answers,
days frozen in place;

a few pages flame out.

one thing or another
gets in the way.

Much to avoid
whistling us home;

old peeling houses
beyond forgotten.

Favorite relics stuffed in a suitcase,
fascinating to someone,

while my ghost seizes more space
to stick memories on the wind.

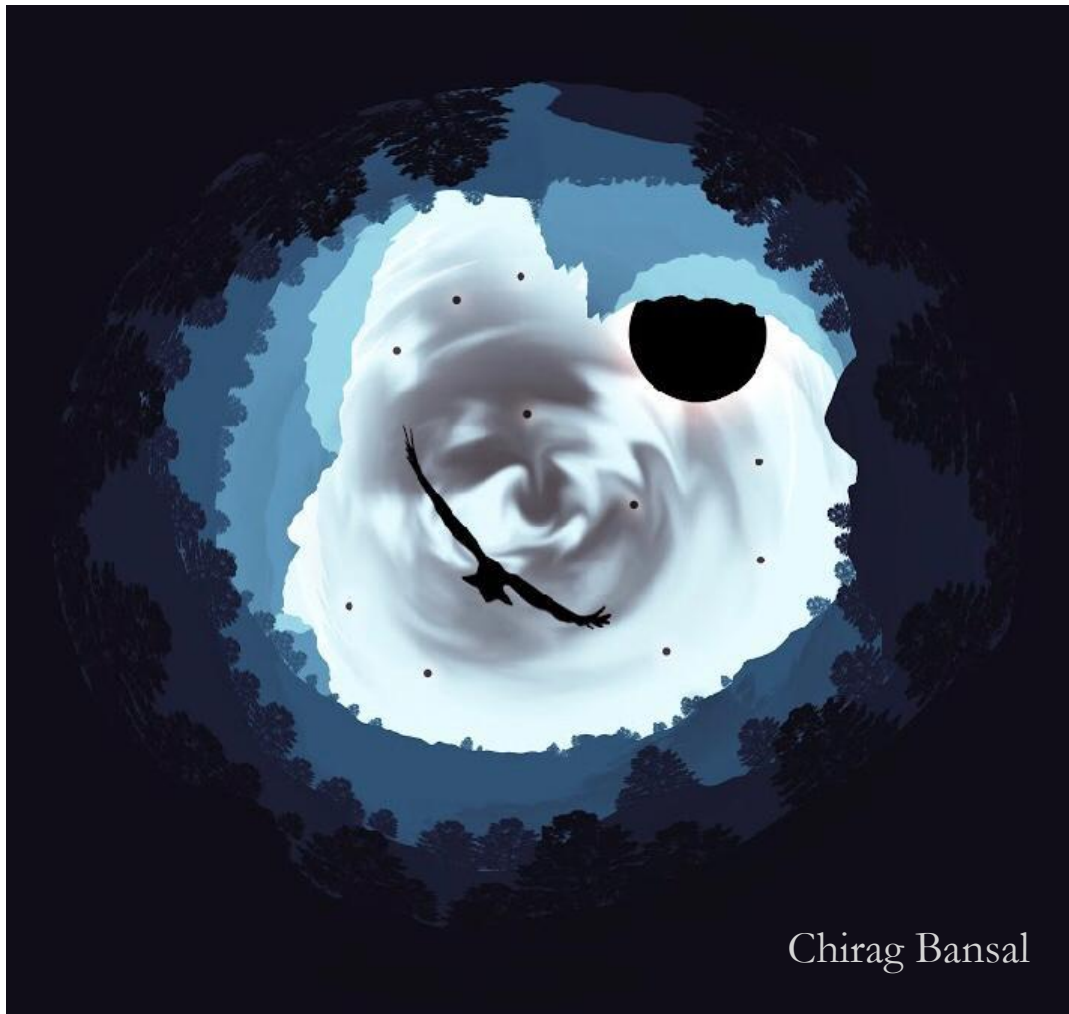
Judy DeCroce, is an internationally published poet, flash fiction writer, educator, and avid reader whose works have been published by Plato's Cave online, The Poet Magazine, Amethyst Review, Tigershark Publishing, The BeZine and many others.

SWINGING ALLIGATOR

J. Archer Avary

When I got
into trouble my
dad took off his
alligator belt and
gave me a ten
second head start,
chasing me
to my room where
I got given to me
what I had coming.
Sometimes the belt
was unnecessary;
like the time
my middle finger
got slammed in
the sliding door.
It was my own fault,
careless in my rush
to avoid the
swinging alligator.
Sometimes you are
your own worst
enemy.

J. Archer Avary is a Guernsey-based poet. His work has been featured in Little Old Lady Comedy, The Daily Drunk, Plum Recruit, Ariel Chart, and The Beatnik Cowboy.
Twitter: @j_archer_avary



Chirag Bansal

TWO POEMS

Kushal Poddar

Silence Coughs

Caught between the now and never
sun swears to requite; a black bird
boomerang tears through the haze
and here comes the rain. Porch makes noise.
Silence coughs Nextdoor. My mother
heats up the water, tells my father
to gurgle with betadine. Rain wipes his answer.
Everything drowned remains fine.
Things fine rot in basement; once my pet
gnawed up a human bone, humour bone intact.
I watch the sun. Water turns to vapour.

Daughter Draws

"Can I watch Pokemon on phone?"
"No, draw a chair, colour something
on the papers lying on the table."

The long kitchen ends into a child drawn
rill trilling on the crags until its evanescence
means a lost picnic, a fishing rod streaming far.
"Cannot you draw anything else?"

She draws a Pokemon with father's face
down in the dirt flashed from the stroke
and sketches trees screaming and a bird
tired to be any bird specific reduced to a V.

A poet and a father, **Kushal Poddar**, edited a magazine - 'Words Surfacing', authored seven volumes of poetry including 'The Circus Came To My Island', 'A Place For Your Ghost Animals', 'Eternity Restoration Project- Selected and New Poems' and 'Herding My Thoughts To The Slaughterhouse-A Prequel'.

Find and follow him at <https://www.amazon.com/Kushal-Poddar/e/B07V8KCZ9P>

ACTS OF SELF CARE

Ginny Darke



I roast chicken and potatoes in my lingerie for
my dog. Today, he did not attack the neighbours'
cat and for that, he deserves this.

Ginny Darke is a Welsh poet who currently lives and studies in Bristol, United Kingdom. She was shortlisted for the 2018 Foyle Young Poets Competition and Creative Futures 2019 and 2020. Her work has been published with Poetry Northern Ireland and Ink, Sweat and Tears.

* Artwork by Nick Maynard

PICTURES

Paul Chuks

In each picture, i find myself furred in--

a cliché ache of my Mother's demise, every page bled

of death's cruel kiss, every smile wrote a consolation letter that failed to give me
solace,

every frown were bursts of gunfire her face shot at life.

All through my little years on earth, i have

walked barefooted through fire raging like a

bellowing wind, ready to burn down a nation, but i

have not learned to live with the pain death drops as

souvenir.

Paul Chuks is a Nigerian poet, writer and song writer studying philosophy at the University of Benin, Edo state, Nigeria. He recently appeared on Kalahari review, Neurologicallymag and is waiting for his other publications. When Chuks is not reading or writing(songs), he spends time criticising the hip-hop game or he's mimicking Michael Jackson.

OLIVE OIL (ARABIC MOMS)

Rami Obeid

And when you're sick —
By yourself

You never really think how
All those times when your
Mama was taking your temperature

She was really setting you up for failure

Mama won't always be there

Rami Obeid is a poet from Toronto, Ontario, Canada. He is a junior editor for Versification Zine and has been published in multiple places. Follow him on twitter @obeid_ro

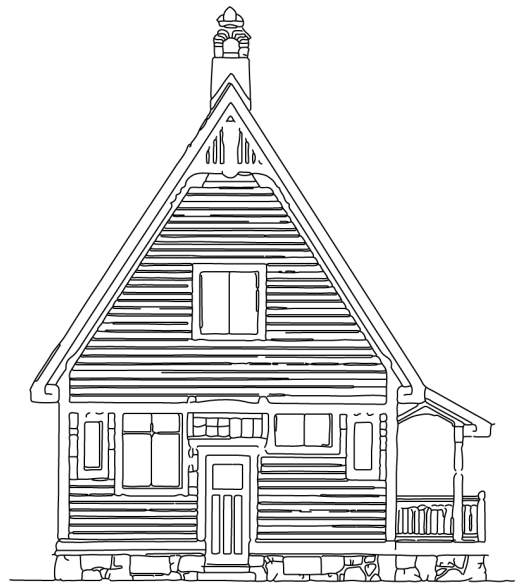


ATTIC HAIKU

Samuel Strathman

rill of rime lengthens
crystalizes spiderwebs
drafty attic chic

Samuel Strathman is a poet, author, educator, and editor at Cypress: A Poetry Journal. Some of his poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Rejection Letters, Ice Floe Press, The Lumiere Review, and elsewhere. His debut chapbook, "In Flocks of Three to Five" was published by Anstruther Press (2020). His second chapbook, "The Incubus" will be in print this fall (Roaring Junior Press, 2020).

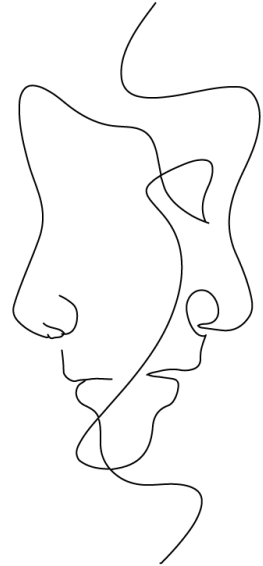


LET ME, JUST ONCE, SWAP PLACES WITH MY SHADOW

Ed C Doerr

I would dissolve this form
to gorge on macadam,
guzzle oil stains.
Imagine the thrill: tugged
on vespers of air, weightless,
without the burden of sunlight.

Ed is a teacher and the author of the poetry chapbook 'Sauteing Spinach With My Aunt' (Desert Willow Press, 2018). He was recently selected as a featured poet for the July 2020 issue of Cathexis Northwest Press. Other words can be found in or are forthcoming from Water/Stone Review, Hippocampus Magazine, The American Journal of Poetry, Sky Island Journal, Trampset, One Teen Story, Dreams Walking, Perhappened, & more. Readers can follow him on Twitter (@EdDoerrWrites), read his TV blog (overstuffeddvr.com), and visit his website (eddoerr.com).



HARSH SYMPHONIC

Jade Moira Lawrence

from my landscape bright blessedness
your hands master a dance
for the mosquitoes who sing their symphonies
you cannot expect me to mould your clay
fold yourself into reluctance
and I will tell you why water is heavy

you break the bones of a goats head
you sip your Brandy sour
shove your country into my mouth
I will swallow you foreigner

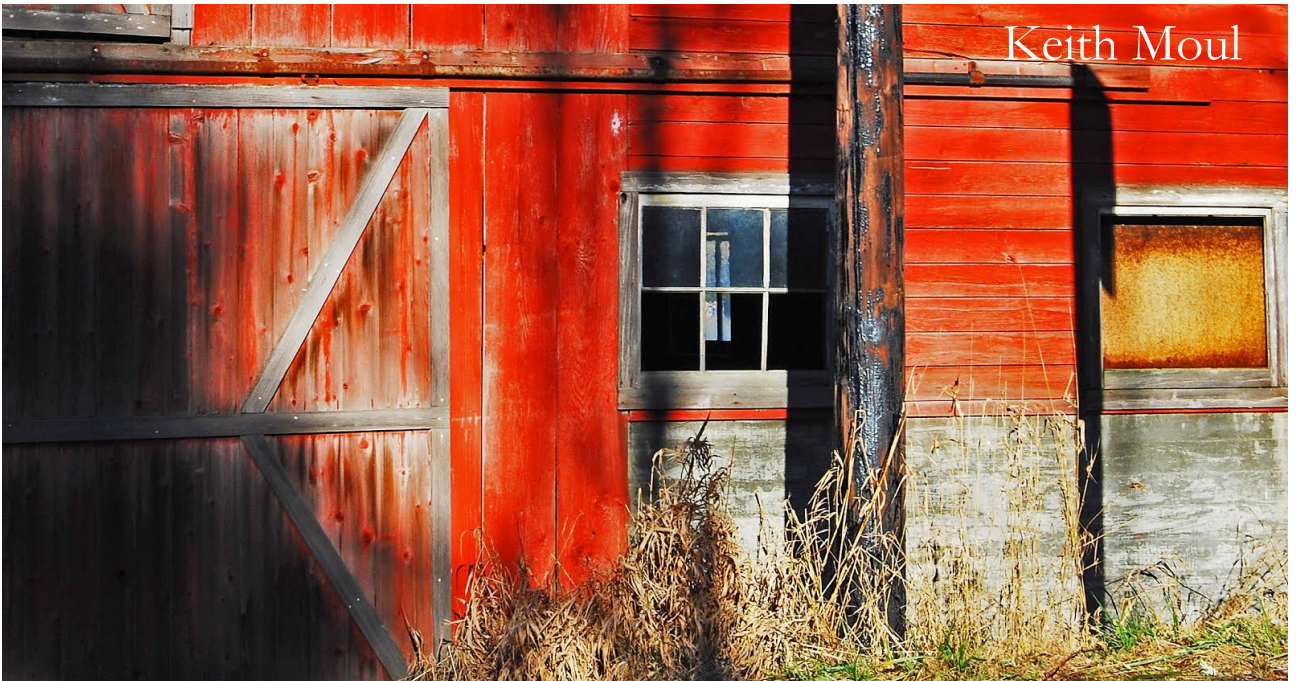
you pound the language of violence into bread
utter in tongue I translate with cotton buds
sprinkle sheftalia as war
pigs swindle integrity
history is proof

your hands act as camera
carry me full on your lips
offer up apologies with tidal eyes
say softness of my body with Aphrodite's tongue

a fist breaks too many promises
you kneel to the cyclone of my arms
how your heat wants to murder my garden

you've made this all into a sea
a vein from your choke-hold hushes rage
never eat the world to find yourself
and then

Jade Moira Lawrence is a mixed heritage writer and poet from south London, UK. Jade has had her writing featured on Visual Verse, Honey and Lime Lit Magazine, and has performed her poetry at Bethal Green Working Men's Club, Poets Corner Brixton, Spoken Word London and The BCA (Black Cultural Archives).



TWO CANDY APPLES

L Scully

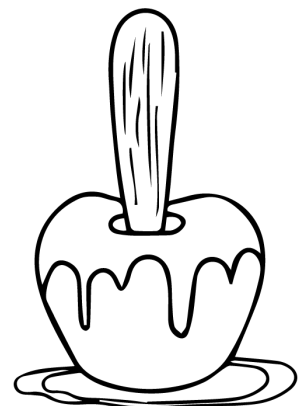
candy apple 1

You take me to the fair and I want to kiss you on every rusted ride. That night a man sleeps in your bed so I take the couch all the way downstairs. My wanting rises three floors.

candy apple 2

I joke about my one-day wedding and you say “ours” by accident and laugh. I touch you in a doll’s house with caramel under my tongue. We lose the sweetness of girls.

L Scully (they/them) is a queer writer and double Capricorn currently based in Madrid. They are the co-founder and prose editor at Stone of Madness Press. Find them in the ether @LRScully.





Chirag Bansal

C IS FOR CONGA

Rachel Harner

“Do you remember conga lines?” I whisper into the darkness. I can tell he’s still awake by the uncertainty of his breathing.

“I do.” His name is Martin, and he’s what passes as a husband nowadays.

“Good,” I say, feeling my muscles relax. I get this way sometimes, worked up that I’m remembering something that didn’t exist.

Martin tells me that I should write them all down, these pieces of Before that trickle in late at night. He suggests I write a picture book, something to teach children about all of the things that disappeared before no one’s left alive who remembers them. I tell him I don’t plan on dying anytime soon. I tell him it doesn’t matter, that maybe they should be forgotten.

When I was little, my godmother gave me a book to teach me the alphabet.

A is for Apple

B is for Bear

C is for ~~Conga line danced at your best friend’s wedding where you got drunk and spilt red wine on her dress~~

C is for ~~Casino where you lost three hundred dollars playing Blackjack on your twenty-first birthday and lied to your mom that you needed money to fix your car but really it was to make rent that month~~

C is for ~~Carousel on the pier where you had your first kiss and it was everything you could’ve hoped for, but then you went back to his car and the next part wasn’t so great~~

C is for Cat

Rachel Harner is a writer living in Los Angeles, where she writes across a variety of genres; including screenplays, stage plays, poetry and prose. Her work has previously appeared in Taco Bell Quarterly. Originally from a rural logging town in northwest Washington State, Rachel holds a B.A. in English from Harvard University and is currently learning how to unicycle. She can be found online at: @rachelharner



Martina Rimbaldo

WASH AWAY YOUR REGRETS AND BE REBORN

Kyle Tinga

The procession came to the river's edge at the height of the storm, one hundred villagers strong and chanting murmured prayers to the god of the waters. Sitting atop a palanquin made of foraged bamboo was his intended, a slender child of a boy clothed in fine silks embroidered with peonies and smelling faintly of jasmine. He had volunteered himself in tribute without a trace of hesitation, his father commended for the bravery and piety of his child. Nobody noticed his half-mast smile as they congratulated his sire, nor the jagged scars hidden beneath sleeves pulled downwards at the slightest provocation. All they saw was how beautiful he would be. How noble. How tragic.

He descended slowly, carefully from his makeshift throne, taking tender steps through the squelching mud and feeling it seep into his sandals, claiming him as its own. Whispered prayers gave way to an intermingled barrage of thought and memory beckoning him to run home. It was not too late to embrace cowardice, not too late to wear the painted smile and scented veils. To ignore the echoes of his own heart, to lie next to another man and speak a woman's sighs, wear a woman's robes, sing and dance gaily of life with gratitude. But the storm sang to him an elegy for the maiden's path, and his voice joined the booming chorus of thunder.

One second he stood upright and tall, staring down the lightning overhead, the next he was welcomed by the river's might. Grasped firmly by the arms of aqueous divinity, barraged on all sides too fiercely to cry, he let his prayer float to the river's mouth. For wisdom, for strength, for the form and life that should have been his. On his lips were psalms for the flowing tide to wash away the jasmine and peonies, to be moulded, shaped, and remade anew. A fervent plea for rebirth. For change.

A moment passed, then two, before the torrent ebbed away and the sun peeked out of its golden perch. There was jubilation and rejoicing, the villagers already making preparations for a feast to celebrate the storm's end. They left en masse happily chattering away, not one of them thinking to turn back towards the river, not one of them dwelling on the one they had left behind. If they had thought to peek backwards, they might have seen the being that descended from the waters, splitting the tide in two. Born of silt and river mud he lumbered forward on unsteady legs, body baking into solid form beneath the midday sun. Soon he would be fully made, the earth sloughed off, crumbling to dust and exposing the muscle and sinew of awakening to conquer the world before him. But first, he had to walk forward. Inch by inch, step by step, washing away what came before and embracing what was yet to come.

Kyle is an author, dreamer, and full-time complainer from the Philippines. Her fiction has previously been published in *Idle Ink*, *Mineral Lit*, and is forthcoming from other publications. She loves the water, and used to dream of being a mermaid. You can find her on Twitter at @PercyPropa.



Colin Lubner

Repossession

Wildness has abandoned the wilderness. Even this I cannot write without paraphrasing David Foster Wallace repurposing a passage from DeLillo's "White Noise" in which a man photographs the most photographed barn in the entirety of the US of A and wonders at the act. Wonders in person disappoint. I was walking to Gallo's for a six-pack of Sierra Nevada and a fifth of New Amsterdam's gin when I watched a pigeon work its way into a streetlight's vivisected wiring. In an ideal world, I think, all things exist in a state of perpetual fixing, constant repair. Through an ingenuity not dissimilar will our future ghosts make their homes. Morphic resonance requires us to remember, for the past to endure as an updated habit. We know neither deserts nor castles. We do not yet exist in comfort amidst chrome. God is dead and Kant's gun still lies smoking. Nietzsche's corpse paces, denying all possible credit. Our ghosts must for this moment and all those belonging to the future trade limbo for limbo. The place at which I feel most at home lies astride a rusted pipe that dead-ends in the sea. I enjoy little company. I entertain mosquitoes and advertisers likewise after my blood. Here there is little to steal save unrecycled recycling and the occasional chemical waft. This is not where I live, but when I die this will be it. Few will visit. For a long time, perhaps forever, there will be no reason.

A Mechanism

Consider a video of a cat. It does not matter what kind of cat it is. A calico. Let us call it a calico. I want you to consider the act of this cat's reaching into a can. The video is uploaded to TikTok, let us say. The can is a Pringles can. This complicates matters in a manner that will, I hope, illustrate my point in this piece. Now, if you will, return to the cat. The video, as originally recorded, runs twenty-two minutes and thirty-one seconds. Shot from the bottom of the Pringles can, the clip depicts the cat clawing at salmon-flavored treats (I presume) placed (I presume) by the cat's owner at a previous time. The shot in question was obtained only with difficulty: a hole was opened then widened with scissors, during the ungainly procedure of which the owner's right hand's index finger was nicked, drawing blood. Then negotiated was the issue of positioning the camera. Owing to the necessary POV (itself necessitated by TikTok's heretofore popular content), the camera must be placed beneath the emptied Pringles can, with its lens aimed vertically along its internal length, thereby capturing the cat in the act of its reaching. As a result of this set-up, though, and much to the owner's chagrin, the camera (although, belonging to an iPhone X, comparatively slim) renders the Pringles can unstable, and thus susceptible to tippage courtesy of the cat's frustrated thrusts. In the final configuration, then, whose twenty-six second distillation we ingest with, at most, an

absent smile, the bottom of the can is stabilized by wadded and layered duct tape and prayer, and still it sits cockeyed.

This is to say nothing of the fumbling dark, the summoning of the cat, the edits in post, the countless insurmount abilities negotiated and now, evidently, scaled. Which in itself omits the pre-posting doubt, the suspension between platforms. To choose to act is to deny a lacuna. The clock ticks. Is this necessary? It is, I think, and you answer, and we answer—it is. At all times I am awed at the time and space required to create. Einstein himself valued above all else perseverance. Work. Imagine your mornings' coffees. The supply lines thereof. Those globe-swaddling chains. Imagine God. A cat pawing at the bottom of a Pringles can. The constructedness and cruelty and futility thereof.

Colin Lubner writes (in English) and teaches (math) in southern New Jersey. His work has either appeared or will appear, temporally speaking. Recent pieces can be found through his Twitter: [@no1canimagine0](https://twitter.com/no1canimagine0). He is keeping on keeping on.

WHAT DOES IT MATTER, ANYWAY?

Josephine Sharpe

They twist their ankles on sea-smoothed pebbles, scavenging for shells and round-edged chunks of glass. They skip flat rocks, one-two-three into the shallows they sink, to be washed up and returned, washed up and returned, until they're sand. They run at gulls, imitate their shrieking, hold their arms to the sky and flap madly.

But there's one. Smaller, grubby underbelly, doesn't squeal or scream or cry. Just pitter-patters away over the rocks, bobs in the shallow water, afraid of what they might do. A fishing hook pierces through its beak, fastening it closed. The plastic lure tucked under its wing, the line wound around, rendering it useless, unable to fly.

The closer they get the further it swims out. They sit and they watch it struggle. There's nothing they can do - or there is, but they don't want to bother, don't want the hassle, don't want the guilt of being unable to help to sit on their shoulders until they inevitably forget. So they go home and they sleep and they forget because what does it matter, anyway?

Past the pier, past the picturesque picnic benches, past the rocks slick with seaweed, in the patch littered with syringes and plasters and tampons, the gull dies. Eyes open, beak shut, spine visible through flesh eaten away, webbed feet limp. Crabs and flies feast.

Josephine Sharpe is a writer and filmmaker living in London. Her work is in *The Daily Drunk Magazine*, *Stone of Madness Press*, *Ellipsis Zine*, and *Analogies and Allegories Magazine*. You can find her on Twitter @Josephin_Sharpe.



Pooja Dua

INTERRUPT, V.

Davis Mercer

1. To break in upon (an action, process, or condition, esp. Speech or discourse); to break the continuity of (something) in time, to break off, to hinder the course or continuation of, cause or cease or stop (usually temporarily).

2. The spaces in the question: why are you here? Air thickens around the words as they extract you. To interrupt i.e. to withdraw no. to be tied to bells painted red beneath an otherwise blue sky.

“State your reason for interrupting.”

Eyes push wind through
your hair and nothing
settles.

3. Spaced open like a wound too fresh to congeal. In this sense, hole means panic and dizziness is a process we swirl through hoping that there is an end.

4. To break in upon the stillness of a lake and sink steady to the bottom of a nameless summer day. The burning of skin is cooled by its swallowing. A trick learned from swim team: making oneself an anchor incubates and weightlessness is like joy: too much of it and the bones turn to dust. Drowning is a kind of rising, the last breath finding its way to the surface as a vaporous cry.

And don't we know how sentences become tundra flash floods first full of debris, cloaked as crawling earth, then flushed of all sense. Nothing left but traces of thoughts mulled over cigarettes and a path carved right through my gut.

Davis Mercer is a young poet studying English in south Louisiana.

PEDRO THE CHIHUAHUA

Connor Davis

Pedro the chihuahua is terrified of squirrels. His usual mighty barks-- directed mostly at the mailman (who is always separated between walls and windows)-- are traded for timid whimpers at the slightest sight of that pernicious brown fluff.

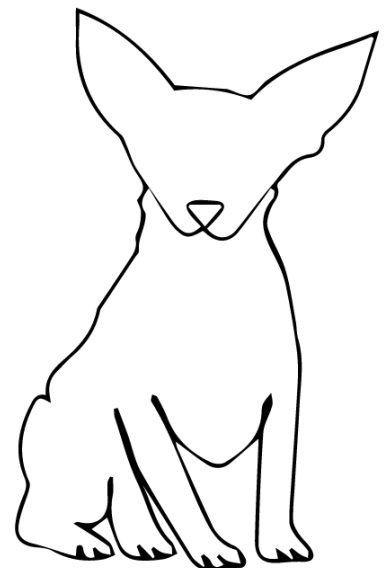
His owner, Kathy, is embarrassed:

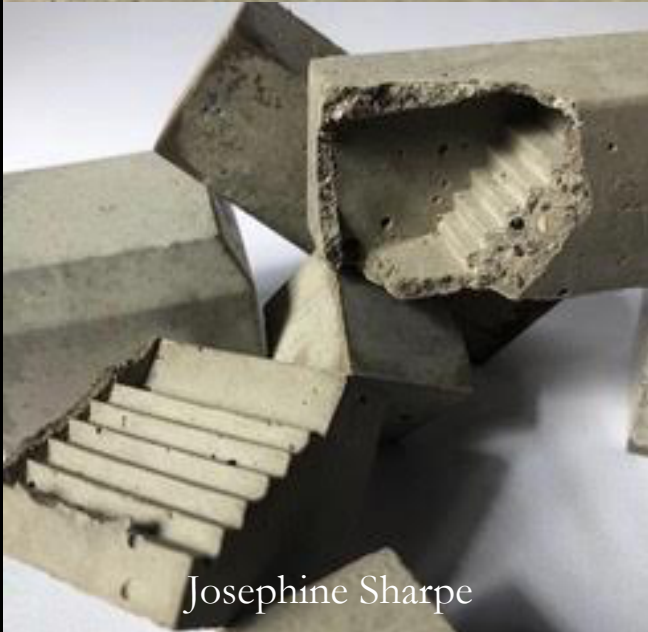
“Jesus Christ Pedro I know you’re small but it’s a squirrel!”

As if to demonstrate to Pedro the harmless nature of the brown American squirrel, she reaches into her back pocket and pulls out a fat bag of trail mix. Kathy likes the cashews and m&m’s, so she picks out a raisin, pinches it between her puffy thumb and forefinger, feeds it to the fat squirrel. No second guessing by the squirrel, it shoves the raisin in its mouth and darts back to its tree to wait patiently for another eventual benefactor.

Kathy pulls Pedro back to her side and they continue the walk, snaking the idyllically trimmed park by way of the pavement, the whole time Pedro thinking about the squirrel and its terrible freedoms.

Connor Davis is a college student. He likes reading and writing short fiction and short poems.





Josephine Sharpe

TREASURE HUNTING

Jamila Wright

"I have maybe five memories from before the age of ten," I tell someone, after showing him a hidden forest, a treasure. "My grandparents have been asking for memories recently."

We sit at the kitchen table and I offer up fragments.

"I remember Daisy Road," I tell them. "I remember the bathroom that was through the kitchen. I remember dad and a builder having a hushed conversation about the dry rot on our walls. Once, I got scared when dad tried to mow the lawn and hid under our plastic slide. I still got grass in my eyes and cried until dad had to stop."

Grandpa gives me a treasure in return. His great-grandfather was a tailor, but his real passion was painting. I think about grandpa's paintings hanging in every room and my sister's sketchbooks full of portraits. "I don't want to sell my art," she told me once. "I don't want to lose my love for it". It's my only memory of my great-great-great-grandfather, and I'm in love with him.

I take someone on a walk, up the river, that I first discovered with grandpa.

At the top, I realise I've never seen the view, though this is my fourth time here. I was timid, I never asked. For the first time I walk up to the cliff edge and gaze down. There's a jade forest on the opposite bank and a suspension bridge high above the water.

"Thank you for giving me this," someone says.

Jamila Wright is a young poet originally from the West Midlands, but currently living and studying in London. Her work covers a range of topics but she is particularly interested in communism, feminism and history as told by marginalised people. Her work is available on Patreon and on her Twitter: @millithepoet.

Toby McShane

‘I should have known you’d be involved in this star-crossed nonsense.’

The weary figures stood with their feet in the sand and wondered when it was, the last time their paths crossed. Neither of them could remember for certain. Gottlieb wagered it was sometime during the Black Death - a nasty old business. Plague victims happened to be very sullen fuckers. Montmartre didn’t argue. It could well’ve been those heady days. Fact of the matter was it was a bloody long time ago.

‘Took a five year bath after all that,’ said Gottlieb, his mood now soured by the memory of millions dead and the paperwork that went with it. ‘And still I didn’t feel clean.’

Montmartre rolled his eyes.

‘Had us running around like, like...’

‘Like blue-arsed flies, Monty.’

‘Exactly, Gott. Like blue-arsed flies.’

Silence fell between them. They stared out over the glistening water as the sun sought refuge behind the horizon. Not even it had the stomach for what they did. Why else did so many slip away in the privacy of night?

‘Beautiful evening though,’ Montmartre said.

Gottlieb agreed and nodded towards the various garments strewn at their feet and away down the beach.

‘You can see why the clothes just fell off them.’

He was referring to a Beatles t-shirt, a floral summer dress, and a pair of boardshorts abandoned in the sand dunes. Further down by the waterline lay a pair of knickers and a yellow bikini top. The girl had been a little slower to strip down to nothing. The boy, it seemed, had run nearly the full length of the beach without a stitch on him.

Gottlieb removed a pack of cigarettes from his breast pocket and offered one to Montmartre, who gladly accepted. Addiction was wired into them and on Earth they had all the vices to fall to and all the time in the world to do it. They revelled in all of the pleasure and none of the mortality. There was a reason they never looked to go back

home. The job was a small price to pay in pursuit of this appealing human concept called hedonism.

‘How’s yours?’ Gottlieb asked.

‘Mine?’ said Montmartre as he let out a long, exasperated breath. ‘She’s not one for heeding the warning signs in life.’ He nodded in the direction of the noticeboard a few paces further down the beach. ‘Literal or metaphorical.’

In big red letters the sign read: BEWARE RIPTIDES.

‘What about yours?’ he asked Gottlieb.

‘Mine’s an ignorant fool.’

‘I’ve had my fair share of them too.’

‘They never learn, Monty.’

‘Yes, well, the fallibility of the young,’ said Montmartre. ‘Isn’t that what they say?’

‘Here, here,’ said Gottlieb.

And across the water the sun continued to sink.

Besides them, the beach was deserted. Were it not, then their presence may not have been required. But Gottlieb and Montmartre had been in the business too long to dwell on the ifs and buts of any given situation. It wasn’t good for the head.

But Montmartre was right. It was a beautiful evening, all told, and they should know. They’d seen enough of them. Salty air pushed around a warm breeze, waves crashed on a lamenting shore, a pair of seabirds engaged in a playful dogfight. They didn’t presume to speak for the Boss but one might have described it as God’s own country.

Montmartre checked his watch.

‘What time do you make it?’

Gottlieb wet his finger to the wind and counted the length of his shadow.

‘I’d say it’s time.’

‘Very good, very good.’

‘A treat to see you, old friend,’ said Gottlieb.

‘Here, here,’ said Montmartre.

And as they shook hands and walked out across the water, the sun finally disappeared.

Toby is a teacher and freelance writer from Salisbury in the UK. He has spent the last three years teaching English in far flung corners of the world but is currently back in the southwest of England to complete a masters in education. He has a particular interest in writing for film and theatre but also enjoys getting stuck in to a short story or two.

Harshita Grewal



QUARANTINE BLUES

Prithiva Sharma

you use the blue knife that I keep in the back of the drawer not knowing it's a bit loose.
it's day 23 in quarantine and you're cutting veggies.
(you cut your finger; the knife breaks out of its handle)

we find an old calendar, with beautiful quotes for each day; we put it up on the coffee table.

even if all you can do is crawl across the floor, it's better than just sitting there doing nothing – it says for 20th march.

the laundry has been sitting in a corner of the bedroom for a week; the last time we left the bed was last evening at 8:36
(we remove the calendar. crawling bruises our knees)

the last time you had a crying spell, I rubbed your back till my arms hurt and the skin of my palms was red.

you tried to make kheer for yourself but it wasn't white enough
(too yellow too yellow too yellow)

you gave it to the family of two that lives three floors down; we talked to them for the first time that day.

two weeks passed; we ran out of clothes except jeans.

so we did laundry – we put everything in the machine, dialing to the maximum wash time.

it was fun, ignoring the moment when I touched buttons and almost toppled over the machine

while in a breakdown; I cried longer than it took to finish the laundry.
(you gave me a tissue box and went to wash my favorite shorts)

it's been tough; we're not used to these four walls.

we live and love each other outside.

but we're learning, without the help of beautiful calendars, with the help of ugly faces and mismatched clothes.

when you water the house plants as I'm cleaning the shelf and the spray waters me instead,

my eyes turn into slits from how wide I smile.

when I wake you up at 7 in the morning saying the pigeon's egg finally hatched, a tiny little baby peeking out,

you click awkward photos that have the pigeon glaring at you.

we like the smell of dettol and powder; and each other.

we live in white kheers and yellow gratitudes from neighbors.
you smell of bird shit and I smell of floor disinfectant. we cry a little less in quarantine.

Prithiva Sharma (she/her) is currently pursuing a Masters in Creative Writing. She loves horror movies, binge reading fanfiction (I'm also writing a dissertation on it!) and taking long naps. She is an Editor at Teen Belle Mag and Nightingale & Sparrow. Her work has been published in The Wellington Street Review, Vagabond City Lit, The Confessionalist Zine among others and can be found at <https://campsite.bio/prithuwu> or on her Instagram @prithuwu, and her reading shenanigans on @prithuplsread.



THE HAMMER

Alice Rose

The hammer slid soft into her palm. It made her wrists feel noodle-weak, the head drooped alongside her thigh as she stepped towards the table. She looked down at the phone on the tabletop. It lay silent between the placemats and coasters.

Saturday morning hummed with water in the pipes. He had put it down to rest before he got in the shower.

She held the hammer over the black screen. The heavy top aligned with the black void that seemed to cut through the wood surface, down through the floor and into the earth. As though if you looked too closely at your reflection, it might pull you through.

How else could she explain its hold on her boyfriend? Enough was enough. She wanted him to look at her again, fully, while she talked. His eyes invested in the syllables of her words. Rather than a look that just noticed you, so you didn't feel ignored when really, he was still focused on the LED's that moved below the glass. Pulling him back to its warm caress like the hot thighs of a new lover.

She raised the hammer. Measuring her hit. Slow, she moved it. Up and down. Like you would practice hitting a nail. She took a deep breath. She brought it down faster. Over and over. Each hit missing the glass by millimetres. Each with a sharp yell that tightened as the tears in her eyes made the table look like a watercolour. She imagined the crunch, the smash. It was just metal and plastic and glass. She wondered if its little pieces would squirt like blood or fall through the air like confetti.

Alice Rose(she/her) holds an MA from the University of Hertfordshire. Shortlisted for the Bath Flash Fiction Award (Feb 2017), Rose has also been published at Crêpe & Penn, Fiction Kitchen Berlin, ReflexFiction and others. Rose writes from her small, St Albans flat, feeding other people's cats and attempting to keep her plants alive. You can find her at alicerwrites.wordpress.com or on Twitter @a1ice_r0se

Harshita Grewal



GRANDMA LULU

Zach Murphy

The savory smell of Grandma Lulu's roasted pork and rosemary potatoes drifted into the living room as Wheel of Fortune played on the television. Riley sat worrying about what might happen if he went back to mom and dad's house. So he captured the scent in a jar and hoped it'd last forever.

Zach Murphy is a Hawaii-born writer with a background in cinema. His stories appear in Adelaide Literary Magazine, Mystery Tribune, Emerge Literary Journal, Spelk Fiction, Door Is A Jar, Levitate, Yellow Medicine Review, The Bitchin' Kitsch, Crêpe & Penn, Drunk Monkeys, Ellipsis Zine, and Wilderness House Literary Review. He lives with his wonderful wife Kelly in St. Paul, Minnesota.



Jessica Evans

Janey Ruth's Mama Gives her Courage

At first the girl was a deer. On a night with barely a moon, just a thin sliver of hooked light fixed to the blackness above, Janey Ruth wished for summer, wished for her sister, wished for life. Hazel eyes too light to be brown, too dull to be green, she scanned the horizon, searching for Daisy Gwynn. Earlier this morning, mama rubbed the girls wrists with coriander seed oil, giving Janey the courage she needed to explore the life around her.

She took a step, wandering, feet free of the sandals mama makes her wear. Her hands in the pockets of her favorite yellow shorts, smiling, her eyes bright. The crunch of spring twigs snapped off by her brothers, arranged in patterned paths toward the woods. Janey followed the path to a clearing, glaring Tennessee sunlight on full display. She walked straight and true all the way to the point where the tree line ended, and the road picked back up again.

Janey Ruth looked just like the straight flat road and that was that. Then her majesty become monotonous. She did not see the truck, did not hear the horn, the driver's shouts, the screech of tires. The sky that morning is a different kind of blue, the blue that made it seem endings and beginnings are bright, cascading between diffuse teal and aching periwinkle. Birds lift their faces to the sky to break the morning.

Daisy Gwynn Wants to Save Her Sister

She is a girl child, small, alone, afraid. Her twin's face is mood ring, mirror to her own emotions. Janey Ruth is four years old, shy, reserved but her sister is all Leo, fire born and full of pride. Daisy Gwynn's copper hair falls in perfect ringlets. She is the child of fairy tales, princesses with towers, of tragic beginnings and rough endings. Middle-sweet softness, like the tales she loves so much, encourage Daisy to be bold.

Boundless love, like the bonds that tethered them in utero, stretches like summer garlands, gerberas and amaryllis, peonies, and freesias, flowers from countries too far away to see. The twins, forever together, separated only in sleep.

On the morning of their death, Janey Ruth bends to pet mama's fetch, an aging tabby too blind to hunt but whose heart is still alive enough to love. Daisy swats a bee bent on stinging her sister and pulls herself up to her full four-year-old might, extolling her prowess, her strength, her protection.

“You’re always safe with me, JR,” Daisy crouches down to whisper in her sister’s ear. She tugs on the earrings her mama insisted on putting in Janey’s ears, indistinguishable from her own. Janey’s wrists smell like Mama’s kitchen. Daisy’s wrists smell like mud and green tree leaves. Janey totters to her full height, smiles bravely at her sister and walks towards mama’s kitchen garden.

Facing south, the forest is behind them, the two-lane divided highway four hundred meters in front of the house. Out back, their older brothers play knife throwing games, despite mama’s shouts for them to stop.

Their mama’s apothecary is thick with magic. Janey trails her left hand over thick reedy rosemary and plucks the leaves.

“Smell this, Daisy!” Janey’s hand is in front of her sister’s nose before Daisy can say no. Janey begins to run toward the forest, itching to be reborn.

Daisy catches sight of the reflective chrome from the MAC truck. She runs after her sister who stops, immobilized in the middle of the road. Daisy looks behind her toward Mama’s garden, their safe space, and grips her sister’s hand tight. Janey is a tree, rooted in the road. Mama hollers from the kitchen but the blare of the horn never reaches their ears.

Jessica Evans is a Cincinnati native. After several years abroad, she's back on US soil. Evans is the flash fiction editor for Mineral Lit and serves as a mentor for Veteran's Writing Project. Work is forthcoming in Outlook Spring and elsewhere. A complete list of publications can be found on her website. Connect with her on Twitter @jessica__evans



RICKSHAW WRENCH AND SPOKE

Shome Dasgupta

Seldom days anyway, they took it upon themselves to care--rare was the occasion they showed up to see the world, mostly huddled in a corner, where there was no light, perfectly content with a glass of water, a piece of bread, and a ragged blanket. But sometimes, there was an innate calling to reveal their magnitude to earth--perhaps some would feel the lands shake and tumble while others kept their eyes closed and covered their ears.

Once, skies darkened--turmoiled, as if volcanic spout--clouds so ghostly they hummed about loss as they twirled about in rage and sadness. This was a day they ventured from their corner--they, in shreds and scraps, bumped bones and weathered scars--barefoot they strolled to recognize the makings of a day as they forgot about time and the meaning of sun and moon. A wind with force--they leaned their heads forward to push through just for a glance.

So we are destitute--so we are the ones not to be greeted for their disgust for us knows no boundaries.

Ashed skies and torn air, they continued as they wondered if they should return to their shelter of tin plates and grains. No love for what they found in a world of no embrace, they glanced here and there, nodded and shook, grimaced and scoffed at their view. And spheres thundered and cracked, electric as it was, they enjoyed the performance--dried lands before them, barren and hungered--they walked upon surfaces jagged and strayed, only to smile at thoughts of home where light was always welcomed but never entered.

So why such a life, so why such a world, so why are they here for such is the way we need not. Let us go let us go. Let the monsoons have their way--there is no argument.

And they turned back with winds in full support, the skies so heavy and sulked, they watched their way to cause no disturbance. But, there--a plea a whimper, that of which only they could hear and receive. Upon strained glimpse to see a tattered rickshaw bent as if elderly, and beside, a little one--a ragged little one--wrench in hand and spoke. With scraped skin and dirt brow, the little one clenched a wheel with teeth and grunted.

And so they pondered over to enquire such activity and task.

Little one, oh little one--why?

With that the child replied.

Please and please, my father's rickshaw has fractured, can't you see and look. The storm is here, my sister away, I must to pick her up and bring home safely.

Still curious and in wonder, they continued to ask.

But why do you bite this wheel and not use this wrench? Are you hungry, child?

The ragged little one in tears--red eyes and bruised face, he answered.

I know not what else to do.

Vibrated lands the wind blew, with that, brought in such rain and confusion for the day was unexpected for all, including them and one. Without word, they took the wrench and spoke and wheeled it all together with squint eyes and hard breath, that which unheard in fury of monsoon's wake--racket and clash went earth, a time of no hesitance. Like that and that, the wheel and spoke attached, a rickshaw no longer unable to carry on its infinite burden.

With glee and joy and shouts deafened by split skies, the little one embraced and pattered away in puddles and rocks to find sister and bring her back home to family. Them--they viewed a large pipe, rust and mud, they entered for shelter and there they slept, such loud banging lulled them asleep and how they dreamt of their corner of the world, their own home, with smiled lips they looked forward to their return as if they had never left.

Shome Dasgupta is the author of *I am here And You Are Gone* (Winner Of The 2010 OW Press Fiction Chapbook Contest), *The Seagull And The Urn* (HarperCollins India), *Anklet And Other Stories* (Golden Antelope Press), *Pretend I Am Someone You Like* (Livingston Press), and *Mute* (Tolsun Books). He lives in Lafayette, LA and can be found at www.shomedome.com and [@laughingyeti](https://twitter.com/laughingyeti).

HER DAUGHTER, WHO IS NOT CALLED AYANNAH

Valerie Cutko

Her daughter. Her daughter. Her daughter sitting across the table in a Lambeth cafe. Her daughter wearing an expensive rust coloured shift from Matches - Faye's seen it in the window - because her daughter is successful and works in the City and carries her elegant brown frame with startling ease.

Something in the tilt of her daughter's head is so like her own she loses track of what her daughter is saying.

'They're cool,' says her daughter who is called Elizabeth not Ayannah. 'My mum was a little nervous about it.'

Faye is not 'mum' and thinks she should be feeling certain emotions beyond awe and weird detached recognition.

Elizabeth, who is not Ayannah, knows through email exchanges and preparatory phone calls the story of her birth, of Faye's circumstances then. She knows Faye wasn't well, although not specifically about the year Faye ate food discarded on the sidewalk, even when she had other choices, because she was mad. Pizza crusts, half-bags of crisps, bruised fruit. What cash Faye got from handouts, or from Ray, who busked with drumsticks on an upturned bucket, she gave to Sealey, who looked more like a regular person than Faye did, to buy cans.

Elizabeth's father and mother are white like Faye, but unlike Faye in any other way she can imagine. He runs an investment firm. She's retired from the bar and does pro-bono work: a good woman. Faye, without Legal Aid, would be in Holloway.

Faye tries to remember cradling this person in the ward at Chelsea Westminster and loving her. She must have, mustn't she?

Elizabeth is not Ray, who was not brown but blue-black, so gleamingly dark that people turned to look at him with something beyond the anxiousness the other black guys got. His grace, his height, like an American basketball star (though his parents were Sudanese) demanded a kind of awe. Faye felt it too, but Ray was more than magnificent, he was kind. He sat beside her on Hungerford Bridge in the August sun, listening to her stories of Leicester, and when she asked him to lie beside her in Vauxhall Gardens as night fell he slept with his arm draped gently round her.

Elizabeth is not Ayannah, the name they decided on, and is not Ray. She is asking about Faye's job and does not know she was conceived in love on a sleeping bag in the Hop Gardens off St Martin's Lane on a perfect summer night.

‘So you’re in charge of all the commercial lettings? Real estate will never let you down.’ Faye shows vacant shops to prospective retailers. Her employer found her the flat in Elephant that she keeps immaculate and gives thanks for every day.

Ray should not have been mortal, they all thought he was better than that. But Faye was six months gone - living in the shelter by then - when they found him in an alley behind Southwark High Street.

Valerie Cutko is an actor-writer based in South London. Her short plays have been winners of the Soho Theatre Westminster Prize and Warehouse Theatre International Playwriting Festival, and her television pilot shortlisted for the Amazon Studios 2019 WriterSlam. Her stories were both shortlisted and winner of second prize in the Fiction Factory Flash competition 2020.

CONFRONTATION

Aqueb Safwan Jaser

Assalamu'alaikum wa Rahmatullah.

Assalamu'alaikum wa Rahmatullah.

Turning his head to the right, then to the left, Akhtar ended his Tahajjud prayer by conveying his salaam. He then cupped his palm, expressed words of gratitude, sought forgiveness and asked for the well-being of his family.

Akhtar adored his family more than anything. His small family, which consisted of his parents, his elder brother and the newly added member, his sister-in-law, Sabha, made Akhtar feel complete.

It was nearly dawn when Akhtar was done praying Tahajjud. By then, the Dhaka breeze carried the late Summer warmth into his tiny room, where there was a small neatly made bed, a straight back wooden chair, and a walnut brown study desk, where a shabby version of Tolkien's Hobbit lay open revealing Thror's Map.

Akhtar was now going to wait for Fajr azan. To bide his time, Akhtar stood beside the window. He took off his topi letting the breeze ruffle his carefully tailored jet-black hair. The hem of his brown shirt swayed against his onyx black trousers. His apartment was right beside the main road and the street scene played out before him.

During the day, noisy cars and the exasperated traffic police clamoured on the main road. On the opposite side, there was a footpath, where pedestrians scurried along like ants in broad daylight. But now, illuminated by the orange streetlight, stood an unkempt man with a stray cat lurking close to his scrawny bare feet. There wasn't much else. On the main road, a car passed by once or twice. But nothing more.

Between the window panes, Akhtar's dark brown eyes lingered on the man. He wore nothing but a dusty pair of trousers revealing a hairy chest which melded with his unshaven face and his rumpled hair. As the cat purred, the man smoked a cigarette while his dark set of eyes transfixed on the star-studded sky.

Trailing along with the stranger, Akhtar too shifted his gaze towards the sky. For reasons unknown, he found the view appealing. Such a delightful sight but everyone just has to sleep instead, Akhtar thought to himself. Then after another momentary glance towards the strange man and his cat, Akhtar went back to his study desk.

It was one of the unique qualities of Akhter. He appreciated the simplicity of life. He probably inherited it from his grandfather, his nana. "Be it History, Philosophy or Science, no matter what you study, it's always necessary to be a good person first",

Akhtar's grandfather taught him that. His grandfather passed away when he was only ten-years-old but this adage clung to him all through the years.

Akhtar never went on a spree like his college mates. He neither drank nor smoked, was a top-scorer in his class and always said his prayers on time, making his parents ever so proud. He was always keen on helping others and believed everyone to be like him. Akhtar's kindness was well appreciated by everyone. Especially by Sabha, his sister-in-law.

When Sabha, who was only four years older than him, stepped inside the kitchen on the first day after her marriage, she was mortified. She wanted to impress her in-laws but she hadn't had a single idea of cooking. Clueless and apprehensive, Sabha fretted about the kitchen. Just then Akhtar politely asked - "May I help you, bhabhi?"

Sabha was hesitant, but her young brother-in-law's earnesty compelled her to accept. Akhtar hurriedly bought down a moth-infested cooking book from the shelf. They sat in the dining room and dug their eyes onto the contents of the volume, which was tearing apart at its seams. After arriving at the section for lunch recipes, they flipped through several dishes. Finally, they decided on shahi pulao, lamb korma and koftas for lunch.

The aroma spread throughout the dining room, as Sabha served the food, Akhtar's parents beamed at each other.

Akhtar had a distinct perspective of the world. He perceived that goodness came to only those who could isolate themselves from the vices of the world. True, he himself wasn't completely secluded from all wrongdoing: the tragic news of bombings, the assault and molestation of innocents, and of course the insignificant bickering and gossip of common men. But Akhtar knew best to ignore such things. He'd shut down the television if it bore catastrophic news, he'd politely leave a social gathering if it involved tittle-tattle and sometimes, he threw away the newspaper before it even reached the dining table, making his father curse at the newspaper boy.

"Damn that rascal! I'm not going to pay a single paisa next month."

Akhtar taught himself to be patient. He learned that not everything in life was meant to occur as planned, that there is no greater teacher than time itself. Therefore, he began to appreciate whatever time had to offer him.

But in spite of his nobility, Akhtar too felt despondent.

During cloudy and solemn days, he often missed his grandfather, his nana. In those times, he pulled out his battered wallet and took a long look at his grandfather's picture. It was an old yellowed polaroid, where his grandfather was clad in a light coloured men's safari. He had grey receding hair and wore square framed glasses. Akhtar remembered going to the masjid with him and to the local dokan, where his grandfather would pamper him with anything he desired to buy. On their way, fakirs and pedestrians would

convey their salaams to him. They all respected him and little Akhtar's curious eyes would twinkle with appreciation for his nana. Reminiscing about his grandfather always raised his spirits. There was still good in the world. At least, that's what his grandfather thought so.

The call to Fajr prayer made Akhtar wake up with a start. Seemingly, he was lost in his musings. The silvery moon began to be veiled up by the advent of dawn. The orange streetlight was gradually dying. There was also a cold gust of wind indicating the chance of a rainfall. Akhtar went to the window again to pull the curtains when something strange caught his eye.

A man wearing a white shirt appeared before the scrawny man. The cat was no longer there. They stood confronting each other but their faces were silhouetted by the ebbing light of the street lamp. It wasn't quite decipherable if the two were having some sort of conversation.

Suddenly, and quite unexpectedly, the man in the white shirt pulled out what looked like a knife. Akhtar abruptly pulled the curtains...

Eyes widened with fear, Akhtar was gasping for breath. His parents warned him of the violence that was part of the neighborhood, but he never witnessed anything himself. Now that he did, he was utterly terrified.

While trying to hold onto the edge of the study desk, he accidentally dropped the Hobbit on the floor. It fell open with the fifth chapter which revealed the title - Riddles in the Dark. He didn't bother to pick it up. To pull himself together, Akhtar scuttled off to the kitchen for a glass of cold water. He gulped one glass after another. Then he closed his eyes.

He thanked his God for giving him a family that would always protect him, and veil him from the darkness of the world. He thought about the times when his mother recited duas over his head before he left for school. He remembered how his father tightly squeezed his hands whenever they went to shop at the crowded bazaar. As these images rushed by him, the doorknob of the main door suddenly turned. Akhtar opened his eyes, his brother entered. He had a stain of blood on his white shirt.

Aqueb Safwan Jaser is a Bangladeshi creative writer who appeared in an anthology titled 'Ten Square: Hundred Word Stories From Bangladesh', 'The Elixir Magazine, Revolt Magazine, The River Bird Magazine, The Daily Drunk Mag, and Unpublishable Zine. Being a cinephile he also writes for High on Films. Currently, he is pursuing a degree in Marketing while working as a Content Writer.

ARTISTS

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Martina Rimbaldo is a 29 year old woman who lives and works in Croatia. She always wears a pen and a notebook in her purse in the case of a sudden inspiration in order to write it down. Her work is published in Nightingale & Sparrow, Oddball Magazine, The sage cigarette magazine, Spillwords.com. Her artwork is published at the weekly blog of Royal Rose Magazine, Bleached Butterfly and Anti heroin chic. Loves to paint abstract paintings, read religious books, watch horror as well as old movies.

Edward Lee is an artist and writer from Ireland. His paintings and photography have been exhibited widely, while his poetry, short stories, non-fiction have been published in magazines in Ireland, England and America, including *The Stinging Fly*, *Skylight 47*, *Acumen* and *Smiths Knoll*. He is currently working on two photography collections: 'Lying Down With The Dead' and 'There Is A Beauty In Broken Things'.

Jacy Zhang studies English at the University of Maryland and interns at MoreWithUs - Everyday Jobs, a job search website. Her photography is forthcoming in *Riggwelter*, *The Lumiere Review*, *the winnow magazine*, and *Cobra Milk*. Besides school, she practices wushu martial arts and worships Jesus with her campus fellowship. You can find her on Twitter at @JacyLZhang

Keith Moul is a poet of place, a photographer of the distinction light adds to place. Both his poems and photos are published widely. His photos are digital, striving for high contrast and saturation, which makes his vision colorful (or weak, requiring enhancement). His grayscale photos are digital, often striving for a charcoal drawing look and mood.

Chirag is a student from MIT, Manipal pursuing bachelor's in engineering. Designing for over 3 years now, he has a keen interest in Illustrations and Graphic Designing. Although his work speaks for him, nonetheless he likes to sum it in one sentence, saying "I design stuff."

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