

KALOPSISIA

POETRY | PROSE | VISUAL ART



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sugar dreams of a manor girl

By: Margaret Wang

i, the manor girl, the spoiled girl
touched a finger dipped in sweet-milk
to the edges of the lower windowsill this morning
and found them to be lined
with dusty spider husks
just as dirty, just as filthy
as i had cared to imagine

i kept a hand on the banisters of soaring ivory
guarding the grand staircase carved
from the flesh of ancients, life long extinguished
voices silenced, even in death, so that
when my silk slippers stepped
lightly
onto the landing
no one dared to groan in misery
bearing the weight in hunched backs and worn
spines, however light i may be

careful streets shifted under our elegant carriages, muttering
quietly— whispers crushed under gilded silver wheels
and the clip-clop of plumed horses
i am a ghost, shielded from the world by
veils of gossamer finery and the faint glow
of a handcrafted antique lantern
this disguise works both ways

my days are spent reading stories and
dreaming up fantasy lands
not of those with dying candles, sputtering matches
whose hands are cracked and browned—
because living in a false palace, spiraling
far into the sky with alabaster walls
is better than staring out the upper windows
at the gray, coal-coated bricks and alleys
choked with the smog of reality

privilege is too quiet
too polite to make a sound, perhaps
in fear of removing the shroud and
revealing the bones underneath
it is the silence that destroys
because if it were to leave we might not
notice we were in trouble until
we were stranded in the whir and click and
endless buzzing of isolated
independence

i wish i were a necromancer
like the wizards in the storybooks
so i could bring that flight of stairs back to life
hear the timbre of their words
but i descend only on their skeletal vertebrae
it is only the difference of a set of stairs
yet already, down below the clouds,
the sugar dreams of three-course meals, readily delivered,
dissolve away
and instead, there is only
the kitchen, tiled in shadow

i test the knife in my hand, it is strangely heavy
bring it to the tomato, lying on the board
i slice it open— along with my palm, but
as the blood beads up and drips
down, mixing with tomato juice
the pain is loud and real
it is a good reminder

so i sprinkle some sugar over it
and eat it with a fork

About the Author

M. Wang is a high school student from the United States. She enjoys piecing together jigsaw puzzles, transcribing songs by ear, and the color orange. She is also perpetually confused.

Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad

About the Artist:

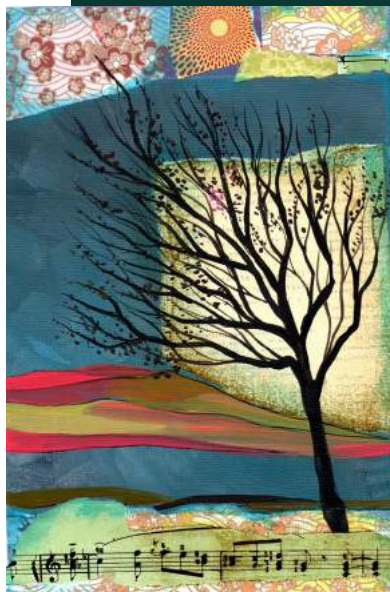
Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad is a Sydney-based artist, poet, and pianist of Indian heritage. She holds a Masters in English and is a member of the North Shore Poetry Project. Her art and poetry have been widely published in both print and online literary journals and anthologies, and her recent artworks have been showcased in *Star 82 Review*, *Otoliths*, *3 AM Magazine*, and *The Amsterdam Quarterly Review*. Her work is forthcoming in *Parentheses Journal*, *The Winnow*, *Pithead Chapel*, and elsewhere. She co-edits the Australian literary journal *Authora Australis*.



Southern Nights
6 in x 8.5 in
mixed media (gouache,
acrylic paints, distress inks,
paper bits)



Windswept Okame
6 in x 8.5 in
mixed media (gouache,
acrylic paints, distress inks,
paper bits)



Liquid Amber fantasia
6 in x 8.5 in
mixed media (gouache,
acrylic paints, distress inks,
paper bits)

blue poem

By: Parker Sera

i.

Time stops
like I'm always hoping it will
and in the morning I feel
adrift in my blue bed

whatever should have been
anchoring me
rusted away

and I am a gradually deflating balloon
headed for the trash island.

ii.

In the clear bright calm
with the breeze of the fan
stirring; Sisyphus
as though churning the stagnant air
represents any
actual change
any actual relief
I know when I wake up
adrift like that

I will wish I hadn't

I will drag my sack of bones across
the floor with my heavy lids and my
hair
and the stale bright air
and stare down the day
as though it matters

About the Author

Parker Sera is a queer poet, actor and theatre-maker from Minneapolis. Her work appeared most recently in Indolent Books' series "Poems in the Afterglow", and has appeared in The Rising Phoenix Review, the Aurora Review, and KNACK Magazine. She lives in Philadelphia, where she's completing her MFA in Acting at Temple University.

in july

By: Jaz Hurford

About the Author

Jaz Hurford (she/her) is a lowly twenty-something flitting between jobs and writing in the small spaces. Her recent works have been published on perhappened, The Daily Drunk, and Lucky Pierre. She tweets inanely @mishurf.

we dine on fresh
lawns. you tell me
this is it,
we are nothing
but a gorgeous
mess of hot

curtain calls and
fumbled lines. a
july romance, you
say; holiday play.
evening traces my
skin and

opalescent moths could
be fairies. *are*
fairies, are mnemonic
sparklers sketching your
name. i always
see your name,

the pink
blush on your
animated cheeks,
full-bodied like
the recherché character
we all believe

we need to
save or
consume in our
quest to inhale
the pretty things.
indeed you slid

straight down my
throat and though
you burnt as
a mediterranean afternoon
you settled betwixt
my lungs as

a second heart
of summer picnics
and sangria, fruit
trees, bark rough
as the love
we made only

on sundays before
church ceremonies conflated
contused skin as
sin and not
satiation. alone, i
am nothing but

dust. lost sand
from last year's
beach trip in
blanketed crevices and
salt in wounds
opening like canned

olives in brine.
i swallow the
pit in my
stomach when you
find refuge in
another's spine

and as heaviness
takes me i
remember cartoon kisses
the way our bodies
used to love
last july.

The Wind-Up Doll

By: Bareerah Ghani

It's 12 a.m. and my hands are trembling. The phone in my hand is shaking. I know what I'm about to do. Alex said this wouldn't hurt as much, now that I know what I know, but it does. My cheeks are warm. Can I hear the slither of my tears as they fall? I hold my breath. No. It's not the tears falling, it's the snake-like slither across the grass outside, like someone's there, army-crawling, inching their way toward my window.

I glance at the panes. Smudged with fingermarks and dirt, blotches of grease, or what looks like it, in the corner near the window frame. I wonder how those got there. The sky beyond the glass looks sooty, sullied perhaps only in my vision. Or perhaps polluted by the secrets of the city that sleeps below it, filled with people like me. Cruel, unforgiving. I wonder how many are about to sever ties with a loved one, hacking up the bloodied bits afterward. I wonder if they can find the strength. I wonder *how* they can. I wonder about a lot of other things too as I lie there, in my bed. (My bed that isn't really mine. I wonder about it a lot, for a while. The word, mine.) My heart aches.

It had been my last night in Karachi. We were snuggled in the backseat of his friend's car when he said, you're mine. He pressed his hand into mine, his grip a little tighter. He leaned in closer, whispered it again as he slid a promise ring on my finger.

But what was the promise?

"Can't believe you're finally leaving—three years," he shook his head. "It's a long time." His head was tipped back against the seat, he turned his face toward me. His hand was still clutching mine tightly. He stayed like that for a while, as if soaking up all of me. Finally, he leaned in as if for a kiss. But he stopped a little before our lips met. He released my hand and slid his across my thigh.

"You know I love you, right?"

He was breathing in my face, creating soft circles on my jeans with his fingers. My hands hung by my sides, limp. The gajra he had just bought for me dangled on my wrist. Its stale jasmine scent enveloped us, binding us one last time, as if it knew the despair I felt.

Splat! Tap! The sounds appear out of nowhere. I strain my eyes to look for the source, the memory flinches, disappearing again. Am I really doing this? The bedside lamp is dim. A cone of dull orange rising up to the ceiling. The rest of the room is dark. I can't tell where the noise is coming from.

I turn to the phone again. I can't get myself to press any button. If the screen illuminates, I know I'll go ahead with it.

The noise distracts me again. It's a loud tap. Like someone just pelted a rock at my window. I turn my head. All I see are the smudges. No cracks. I look away for a second when there's another thunderous strike. The window has changed. Now cluttered with fat droplets that are smacking against it, one after another. Their rat-a-tat increasing, as if they know I'm staring so they're asking to be let in. I wouldn't mind that, honestly. London rains have been friendly. My heart doesn't pound in my skull, competing to outdo their pitter-patter. It's always slow and steady, synchronized with the pelting sounds. It's never like that in Karachi. There, it used to lurch at the roar of thunder and sink at the silver strike of lightning amidst gray misty clouds.

Lost Chips

By: Bareerah Ghani

1960, Saddar, Karachi—a land frozen in time—doused since the early days, in the same hues of gray, dirty brown with the occasional red flailing as a dupatta dries in a balcony. Back then the cramped streets weren't filled with horns blaring, cars bumping against one another. Instead, there was only the *tring-tring* of bicycle bells, and the occasional guttural sound of a motorcycle or the whistle of a bus. Even the donkey carts were quieter; respectful of the wounds still healing behind closed doors. After all – the pain of losing loved ones cuts deeper when they are right across the border, but you know you can't bring them back... when they are there, alive but just as heartbroken, just as helplessly detained as you. But this isn't a story about that kind of loss. Someday, I'll tell you about that too. But today, my boy—today is fit for a story about losing a love you never had. A love briefly tasted, but bittersweet enough for the flavor to linger, lasting a lifetime.

The month was August. Summer had just ended, and the news came: I had passed my intermediate exams. Abba huzoor doled out his order: Haider would be in charge of opening the shop from now on.

The next day, at the second crack of dawn—right when the sky sheds its purple layer and borrows a lovely yellow from the sun—I was ready to set out. My bicycle polished the night before, the cream-colored shalwar kameez ironed too. I gulped a steaming cup of chai, ammi ran her hands over my cheeks, blowing a prayer.

I ran a rag over my bike to wipe away the dew drops, and then hopped on. If I had known fate awaited me, only a ten-minute ride away, I would have spent a little time straightening my hair with a wet comb. Actually—never mind, I wouldn't have.

I turned the corner of my street. Two more turns, two more streets and I'd have arrived at my destination. But when I wheeled round the second corner, the winds shifted course, slapping my face as if excited for what lay ahead.

The street was empty save for a lone stray dog, trotting, burying his nose in places he knew he shouldn't. *Tring, tring*. I rang the bell, startling him. A mischievous half-smile crept up my lips as I watched him scurry toward the end corner, his dirty gray-brown coat disappearing from sight. The clouds parted just then, and the sun sparkled in the silver head of the barbell... its light almost blinding. I lifted my eyes for just a moment when the sight struck me. I jolted to a stop.

She was on a balcony up ahead, maybe the third floor, flinging a damp white cloth. A pink kameez, hair tied in a bun, silky black wisps falling down to her cheeks. Her brows creased as she exerted all her strength into hurling the cloth over the rope, the sun shimmering golden on her hands. Her eyes fell on me and I jumped out of the seat, as if a cadet called to attention. But oh – she was gone the next instant. She had glanced only once, and flipped around, walking away with a chip of my heart, leaving me restless for the rest of the day. It was only a chip but when you're twenty, everything feels like a whole lot more—doesn't it?

The next morning, I woke up at the same time to the same shiny bicycle and the cream-colored shalwar kameez waiting on me. There was a routine in the making – chai, ammi's prayers and then feet pushing against the pedals. *Tring tring. Tring tring*. I signaled my arrival on the street, empty as the day before. Her balcony still a few steps ahead but she was a spectacle—a vision of loveliness—even from a distance. The same pink kameez, jet black hair—but wait. The hair was slicked into a bun with a wet comb. Her cheeks rose tinted. Her eyebrows furrowed just the same, her shoulders jerking as the kameez in her hand went in the air, over the rope. And then, only then she lifted her eyes and they lingered for a moment longer than the day before.

Another chip lost, happily.

Together, she and I fell into a routine of minute-long encounters on a silent street. Where our eyes spoke... our hearts beating in unison if only just for a moment. It lasted a week. And as the second week approached, I wondered if that was it—if I was only meant to have a taste?

But come next week, she was still there. Except, the morning was brighter than all the ones the week before, for she lingered two heart beats longer, a smile on the cusp of both our lips but not quite there. I wanted her to be the first. On the Friday of the second week, she acquiesced. Her eyelids fluttered, her lips stretching. A sparkle danced in her eye as her fingers pushed the cloth hanging on the rope and she peeked from behind. Flash, two heartbeats, flip, and gone. Chips taken this time, in handfuls.

On the weekends, I replayed those moments over and over, waiting for the hours to pass me by, for the sky to turn dark sooner so it could shed the night away quickly, bringing me hope on a platter, fresh on Monday mornings.

Third week. We almost stuck to our routine but then she peeked out from behind the hanging laundry, her cheeks a tint rosier. She lingered two, three, four heartbeats longer. Smiles finally swept over both our faces and then her hands reached up. The thick black tresses fell like a waterfall—plummeting down, down, down, beyond her waist – disappearing behind the ledge. A flash, four heartbeats, then a flip. And all the chips rolled away, hiding in her swaying hips, disappearing back into the house.

Heart half-chipped, yet full—the weekend came and passed, fate sweeping me in its tide.

But oh – the fourth week surpassed all expectations. The pinks had transformed into reds. She stepped out of the screen door, scarlet on her lips, adorning a glimmering ruby kameez, like she was a bride already. Strands of black hair teased her chin, the rest now hidden under a dupatta draped all over her head as if guarding her most valuable treasure. A sudden demureness in the way she peeked for only two heartbeats, eyes blinking so slowly, gently as if afraid to miss out on me. Flip, the silver chunri sparkled at the edge of the dupatta, and then she was gone.

The weeks came and went. And she only appeared in the early morning hours, the reds, pinks, and the shiny jet-black flashing, barely a heartbeat longer, in street corners far from the house that used to be hers.

About the Author

Bareerah Y. Ghani is an MFA candidate in fiction at George Mason University. She is currently working on her first collection of short stories inspired by Karachi, the city where she was raised. You can follow her on Twitter @Bareera_yg where she usually whines about first drafts, and the stress of having an ever-growing TBR list.



growing pains
Luana Côes
2000 x 2000 pixels
acrylic and watercolor on paper

driftwood: to my mother's daughter far away from home

By: Martins Deep

(for Okhiemute)

when death puffed papa—
trapped in a ring of smoke,
he left us a body we could
identify in its ashtray, at st. gerard's morgue.

after interment, mama in saltwater showers
became a lad's watercolor portrait washing,
washing, *w a s h i n g* away
into lifeless eyes; a laughter that heralds harmattan;
her mouth: a cavity echoing an elegy of crows.
and the colors you could have spared,
you reserved to dye coats for thankless shadows.

on evenings ever since,
sighs carved her bed into a frost-coated bier.
papa's ghost would sneak through the fissure on the wall
to offer her a body soaked in sunrise.
*[and quickly, that fissure is widening; a suction
gathering pressure to draw her into a safe passage]*

in a tempest, the only thing that
never suffers wreckage is driftwood
so, you shapeshift, dancing to the rhythms of tide,
because the evil eye of the sea
haunts everything found with a chart.
you float, *d r i f t w o o d*
knowing only to dance with flotsam.

a whale gapes ahead,
yet you float,
smuggled by waves that bring
the bodies of dead fishermen home.

among the ghosts disputing over my body

By: Martins Deep

moulting the score
of tegan & sara's '*dark come soon*'
which has become my epidermis,
i bleed.

bleeding tonight, i find a rag
on ma's lap to wipe my hands with.
she's grinding kolanut into a paste of blood moon,
as the head of a man in the cave of her mouth

— the man who *crushed*
her daughter's tender grapes
against the walls on black street,
for a mural of grief.

you held it up to me
when first light cleared my bloodshot eyes.
there was the stain of my hands
blended into *the man's*, into yours.
it was your white smock
sewn you the eve of easter sunday.

this is your earliest memory
of acrylic on canvas.

About the Author

Martins Deep (he/him) is a Nigerian poet, artist, & and currently a student of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. His works deeply explore the African experience. His creative works have appeared, or are forthcoming on FIYAH, The Roadrunner Review, Covert Literary Magazine, Barren Magazine, The Hellebore, Chestnut Review, Mineral Lit Mag, Agbowó Magazine, Suburban Review, IceFloe Press, FERAL, Libretto Magazine, The Shallow Tales Review, Kalahari Review, & elsewhere. He loves jazz, adores Bethel Music and fantasizes reincarnating as an owl. He tweets @martinsdeep1

The One Whose Face You Can't Remember

By: Adelina Rose Gowans

Nina's mother believes in the evil of humanity. In the evening, she implores her two daughters to *watch out!* for bad men and monsters. She shakes the clothing iron in her hand for effect, dripping sizzling steamy water onto her husband's best church shirt. Nina is watching TV. The weatherman shouts with big white teeth, predicting rain for the next three days, and she thinks of how uncomfortable it will be to walk to the bus stop in the rain—how everyone on the school bus will be shaking their wet umbrellas and making the floor slick. Her sister Carmen sits on the carpet, eating maraschino cherries out of the jar, which her mother doesn't approve of but seems to ignore in favor of other topics. The sugary syrup stains her fingers pink-red. Sticky.

Again, their mother says *be careful!* Tonight she's harping particularly on not-real things. Nina's mother loves to talk about not-real things, like two tongued spirits disguised as women who steal children away.

"They look just like real women," she says. "That's the kicker. So don't ever listen to someone who comes up to you and tells you—I don't know, that they're my friend or something? And that they need you to come with them. If something happens to me, I'll tell you or your father will if I'm dead. Okay?"

"Yes, ma'am." Nina replies.

Carmen chews a cherry too quickly, chokes, and coughs it up into a little pink lump on the carpet, which the dog, previously asleep beside Nina's feet, starts to lick up. The weatherman is gone now, and the news has shifted to a crime report: a drug store pharmacist robbed at gunpoint for opioids last night. The pharmacist, a thin, soft-spoken man in his forties, is interviewed outside his place of work. He says: *I'm very glad to be alive. Also—Mark, if you're watching this, I'm quitting my job.*

*

Do mythic monsters survive to hunt the second generation? When Nina first told her parents she wanted to be an anthropology major, to learn the history of how people have lived through time, they looked like those wax museum sculptures with glassy, obviously-fake eyes. They said, in unison, like a voicemail recording: *you're fourteen. You have plenty of time to decide what you want to do.* Her mother then told her that when *she* was fourteen the only things she worried about were boys and La Llorona. Said every night she prayed the wailing woman wouldn't wander up and *tap tap tap* on her bedroom window. Nina understands their uncertainty, but she also zones out during most of their lecturing. Once, she tried to tell her mother about La Llorona's narrative roots in the conquistador's brutal colonization of Central and South America, but again her mother looked at her with empty eyes. Nina isn't sure what myth the two-tongued spirits are from, but she imagines them nonetheless: eating hamburgers in their spectral cars and braiding their dream hair, eyes fixed on something unknowable in the distance.

*

At school, Nina sits behind Marco, who is always talking about cryptids. Once, he swore his family's cat was killed by the Chupacabra.

"The blood was sucked right out of her neck," he whispered, and with two fingers, imitated stabbing himself repeatedly in the jugular. "It was the scariest thing I've ever seen. Like, totally demonic."

Like her mother, Marco loves not-real things. In fact, as he often shares with her, he runs a WordPress blog dedicated to reviewing books about cryptids.

“Bigfoot, Mothman, Nessie, y’know. People are always writing about the popular ones, and somebody’s gotta go through it all to really find the diamonds in the rough.” He told her all this very proudly when he started his blog, back in seventh grade. The baseball players still ridicule him about it, but his ad revenue is through the roof.

“It’s the Bigfoot boys,” he tells her today, “I was running some demographic analysis last night, and those middle-aged white dudes go feral for my Bigfoot posts. Isn’t that wild? They’re like, 80% of my overall hits.”

“Really?” Nina replies. “That’s kinda cool.”

“Yeah,” Marco continues, “but I don’t know. I don’t wanna only be the Bigfoot book review guy. There are so many dope cryptids out there, people just need to write more books about them. Have you ever heard of the Lizard Man of Scape Ore Swamp? Or the Mongolian Death Worm?”

At first, Nina just continues listening and nodding her head, but Marco stops and looks at her. His eyes are big and brown and perpetually-excited behind his tortoiseshell glasses. His hands, bumpy and pink with eczema, are covered with little pen doodles and notes. He is so unspeakably beautiful. Beautiful in the way pretty people and tv shows don’t talk about because they don’t even have the capacity to understand it. In front of him, their teacher is reading the most recent *Oprah Book Club* novel. Marco itches his wrist.

“I haven’t heard of them, no,” Nina confesses quietly. “But how about you tell me their stories?”

*

On the walk home from the bus stop, it rains again, but Nina still takes the long way. She walks by the houses with white fences and weird yard art and little flags staked into the ground with sayings like *BLESS THIS HOME* and *BEWARE: KILLER CAT LIVES HERE*. On the corner of the street intersecting her own, she looks at Marco’s house. He isn’t home yet because of his debate club meeting, and she’s pretty sure his parents are both at work, but one of them has accidentally left the garage door open. The persistent rain trickles in, pooling around the entrance, and inside a broom has fallen from being propped against the wall. For a moment, Nina considers running in and fixing it to make sure that one of Marco’s parents doesn’t run over it, but then she sees her.

At first, she is Marco’s mother. Then, she is his sister. Then, she is something else entirely but familiar. Like a second or third cousin at a family reunion who you only see on holidays. The one whose face you can’t quite remember. She is drenched with rainwater and holding her stomach, but she is smiling nonetheless. A big, toothy, weatherman smile that stretches her mouth into an expanse of everything. She is almost see-through, but not quite. She is wearing a maxi dress with polka dots. For a moment, she stares at Nina, and Nina stares back while the rest of the world only sort of exists. She smiles and beckons Nina towards her like a dancer, and Nina thinks of dancing in the kitchen with her mother. How they would hold hands and twirl to Eydie Gormé—Nina would shut her eyes and imagine they were in Paris or Argentina or wherever the fanciest dancing people were supposed to be.

Often, they would dance like this to decompress after an argument, after Nina had said something like: *I'm fourteen, Mom, just let me live my life!* and her mother had replied with a classic: *oh so you know everything now? Okay. I'm just going to go on a vacation this summer all by myself, because you obviously don't need me.* Then they would pause, and look at each other, and laugh. Nina wishes she were dancing, now.

"Sorry," she shakes her head and shouts to the woman, "My mom's really serious about me not talking to strangers. Have a nice day, though."

The woman smiles again, seemingly unfazed, and waves at Nina. Behind her teeth, Nina wonders if she has two tongues. If she does, they're not visible when she smiles, really, but then again Nina is not very close to her and can't quite see her face. Maybe she's La Llorona gone suburban. Or a being no one's ever heard of before. Or maybe just a human woman searching for something. Still, Nina smiles and waves back to her, unsure of why she can't take a single step. Why her feet feel cemented into the suburban sidewalk. Her mother's voice echoes like a small miracle in her head, her emphatic *watch out!* and Nina thinks back *I'm trying!* The woman is still smiling as Nina raises her heavy foot, and takes a step away.

About the Author

Adelina Rose Gowans is a 17-year-old Costa Rican/Honduran-American writer. She is a senior at the South Carolina Governor's School For the Arts and Humanities, a 2020 YoungArts Winner in Writing, a member of the Adroit Journal's Summer Mentorship Program 2020 cohort, fiction editor of EX/POST Magazine, winner of the Leyla Beban Young Writers Foundation 1,000 words for 1,000\$ contest, second place winner of the Hollins University Nancy Thorp Poetry Contest, and the recipient of eleven Scholastic Art & Writing awards. Her writing has been previously published or is forthcoming in Ambit Magazine, The Minnesota Review, Storyscape Journal, Barely South Review, Cargoes, Tinderbox Poetry Journal, Scholastic Best Teen Writing 2020, and elsewhere. More of her personal projects can be seen at <https://www.adelinarose.me/>.

Heat Lightning

By: Susan Waters

Little girl waiting by a mumbling stream
not even knowing the name of what she wanted.

Nervous teen, waiting
by a phone into the long trembling night
only the insects
—all noise and crass, calling to each other—
seemed content.

I always was waiting
for love
even though it held my hand
sang my name
wrapped its tendrils around my bones

I must have thought
love was a hitchhiker
with a look in his eyes
that meant
the road is long, is calling.

About the Author

Susan Waters started out as a journalist covering hard news in upstate New York and for 13 years was a magazine editor and writer at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, College of William and Mary. Her publishing credits are extensive. She has won 10 prizes in poetry and has been nominated twice for the Pushcart Prize in Poetry. Her chapbook *Heat Lightning* was published in 2017 by Orchard Street Press. Currently, she is Professor Emeritus at New Mexico Junior College.

A Nation's Anatomy

By: Dmitri Derodel

America keeps more than just our spines.
She never digs anything up—she plucks hairs from who's here,
reassuring herself that all exchanges are mutual,
but nobody she takes from knows she's got anything.
They think it's all symbolism.
They say, "here is my heart, America,"
and she will yank off a leg within ten minutes.
Miraculously, the people still march.
Most of her bones hail from places
where fists wrap around bars that might as well be bones.
I don't have the money to buy back my body.

Have we forgotten her jaw?
That she is in fact a whole physique
crammed together from lost parts on the side
of the road, every screw and scrap of meat (in her words,
human or "foreign") convincing themselves
that *together* means *no longer broken*?

No drop of her blood can shiver enough to warm itself.
She manages to force a smile that begs to differ.
This bony chatter, a new applause, the native language
of gunfire, the clenching of teeth dipped in paint
spoiled like milk and a child.
She chews the rhythm of riot gear and tactical boots
and pretends she isn't fighting herself.

Her body works for her. We don't ask for a dime.
(America has miles of duct tape.)
Take our dust and name it spice,
grind our ash and call it black sugar.
My god, we must taste so, so sweet.

About the Author

Dmitri Derodel is a poet, songwriter, essayist, and Scholastic Gold Medalist. He's been published in The Best Teen Writing of 2020, Navigating the Maze 2020, Brown State of Mind, Bitter Melon Magazine, and Rising Phoenix Press.

Bread and Circuses

The best part of anyone's day was always the four o'clock broadcast. For an entire hour, watchers could enjoy with bloodied fascination the plight of the humans that the station had harvested daily. The stadium itself imitated a circus, all red banners and yellow spotlights and carnival music, which families could admire as they took their seats on the couch. At exactly four o'clock, the host stepped onstage and began his rousing introduction. It was always the same speech, but you know what they say about announcer voices—clear as a bell, enchanting as a forest. By 4:05, the audience would be bouncing on the edge of their seats.

Next, some miserable chained human would walk onstage while onlookers jeered from the comforts of their own homes. For an allegedly egalitarian society, perhaps this just goes to show that everybody needs someone to lord over, even if that someone is naked and cowering and sentenced to be ripped apart from lung to liver. It might be fun to digress into psychological power complexes and hierarchy, but that discussion wouldn't be nearly as interesting as the four o'clock broadcast.

Then the host spins a neon-lit wheel and the top arrow bounces *tick tick tick* over each ridge. Soon the ticks slow and the audience leans closer like a pack of night animals, preying with their eyes instead of their teeth, rocking on their sofas instead of their haunches. Finally, the arrow overcomes its last ridge and clicks into place. The audience almost always cheers and the human onstage almost always recoils at the wheel's flashing words: *Poison-Tongued Lizards! Russian Boar-Wolf! Lion Tarantula Swarm!*

Some poor interns would wheel out a terrible iron-clad cage holding whatever atrocity the wheel had chosen. The prisoner would have ten seconds to choose a weapon and scramble to a strategic location. Then the cage doors would open, and the massacre would ensue.

It would never last more than ten minutes. The current record goes to a woman who scaled the stadium walls within the first ten seconds. She performed an awfully impressive balancing act as she clung to the light fixture with her lower body, hiding in the framework of the wiring. For five minutes, she shot arrows into the skin of the six-foot lizard as it searched blindly for its enemy. In the sixth minute, the producers decided that there wasn't much entertainment in watching a stumbling reptile with impenetrable skin be struck over and over again with rubber-tipped arrows. They pushed a couple of buttons and snapped the light fixture, tumbling the woman back to the concrete floor.

The struggle that ensued, on the other hand, was entertainment at its finest. The gargantuan lizard scrambled to exact its revenge, while its victim threw herself upright. Brandishing her bow like a sword now, she leapt at its hindlimbs, swinging relentlessly at every surface of scaly skin. For a moment, everyone wondered if she might just be winning, before the shrieking reptile reared its tail and whipped her flat across the back. The crunch of bone shattering was deafening.

Again, the woman staggered back up as the lizard swiped again. She barely dodged to the side, but a claw tore her sleeve and raked a crimson line through her wrist. With a scream, she dove under its rearing head and drove her bow into its exposed underbelly. As the beast thrashed, she raised her bow once more and, with her other arm limp and slippery with blood, prepared grimly for one final strike.

Nobody saw the tongue coming. As she swung her arm back, her legs suddenly collapsed, swept out in distorted angles beneath her. By the eighth minute, the poison had gnawed through her right arm up to her elbow, while her bloodied leg pathetically from the ground where she lay spread-eagled. In the twentieth second of the eighth minute, the lizard stepped onto her chest and, unwinding itself into its full length, sank its teeth into her neck.

But for the most part, the fighters hardly lasted that long. Within three minutes, their flirt with death met its end as twelve-foot snakes strangled their windpipe or red-eyed wolves scratched out their eyes. Naturally, the question arises of how this four o'clock broadcast could possibly continue for an hour—after all, acquiring humans to kill was quite difficult and the beasts needed their rest too. And so, the second and arguably more exciting half of the broadcast involved the animals feasting on the spoils of their fight. The audience cheer as tigers tore off the raw leg of long-dead fighters or as wolves snapped corpses' ribcages and gnawed on their bones like dog toys. For a secular society, perhaps this just emphasizes how everyone worships death at least a little, whether out of fear or morbidity or passion, since what is religion but a construct to explicate mortality? But of course, that tangent is not nearly as exciting as the four o'clock broadcast, and so it must be omitted.

Frankly, the second half of the broadcast was quite ingenious on the producers' part from a utilitarian standpoint. It meant that they didn't have to hire janitors to clean up the bloodstains and mangled remains, nor would they have to spend money on food for their animals. By the time the beasts had their fill, the stage would be quite clean, in fact. Then the curtains were drawn, and the wheel waved a big "SEE YOU LATER!" as the audience exhaled collectively, nothing left to do but await tomorrow's broadcast.

*

The worst part of anyone's day was always the kidnappings. But they happened quietly and discretely enough that nobody really thought much of them. Take, for instance, the following incident of the Brooks household.

Mr. Brooks was quite ordinary except for a missing eyebrow. Honestly, he found this defect a bit irksome, but at least Little Arthur Brooks could derive joy from drawing on an eyebrow with his fat purple marker and announcing that "Daddy's fixed!"

On this particular day at 3:45, Mr. Brooks was sitting at his swivel chair and scratching his head when he heard a knock at the front door. He mumbled something about civility, evidently irked that his head-scratching and chair-swiveling had been disrupted. Mr. Brooks was an easily irked man.

But when he opened the front door, he was promptly struck by a wooden club.

"Hey, hey, what's the big idea?" he demanded to his masked attacker before collapsing to the ground with a staggering thud.

By the time the rest of his family ran over, Mr. Brooks was already being dragged out the door. Leaving a trail of blood, his purple-bruised head lolled to one side. He tried to call out to his wife, but just as he opened his mouth, he collapsed again, this time with a bullet shot straight through his left knee.

The moment was so surreal that Mrs. Brooks could only gape in helplessness. She stood immobile as the masked man pulled her dead or alive husband over the door ledge. While his head bump bump bumped down each stair, she looked down slowly, realizing her feet were completely soaked with his blood. She wondered if this was all a dream.

It was only when Little Arthur came crawling to her side and squeaked “Daddy?” that the brunt of reality slammed Mrs. Brooks. All of a sudden, she was sobbing, burying her face in Little Arthur’s shoulder and clutching at his shirt. She felt her heart being squeezed and stretched in rhythm with her shaking chest. Now she howled, a horrible sound interrupted only by shallow gasps for breath. When she ran out of tears, Mrs. Brooks resorted to retching quite loudly. Little Arthur pulled away instinctively, leaving her to lurch forward and crumple to the ground in a puddle of her own tears. She choked in heavy trembling breaths with her forehead pressed against the wet floor while Little Arthur looked on, quietly wondering how long this was to last.

But the human biological clock is a miraculous thing. At promptly four o’clock, as the sound of the TV drifted down the hallway, Mrs. Brooks rose in curious wonder. Her eyes were dry. They flitted around nervously and focused on a single entity—the TV set, where a voice, clear as a bell and enchanting as a forest, rang forth.

“Ma?” whispered Little Arthur.

She walked to the family room as if waking from a dream. Her eyes were still glazed over. The host was spinning the wheel already. *Tick tick tick*. She leaned forward and the last tick resounded decisively. *Tick*.

Brazilian Boa Constrictors!

Mrs. Brooks was recovering her senses now. She cheered from her seat. From the back of the stadium, the man groaned. It was quite a weak groan. He wasn’t going to last a minute. His head was already bruised and he walked with a limp. Somehow, he was missing an eyebrow.

“Ma—” Little Arthur tried again.

She barely looked at him. Her eyes were still trained on the screen. “Shush, honey. The fight is about to start.”

With that, she propped her feet up on the sofa and watched a nine-foot snake strangle Mr. Brooks to death.

After all, the best part of anyone’s day was always the four o’clock broadcast.

About the Author

Samantha Liu is a 16-year-old aspiring writer in New Jersey with a penchant for all stories Voltaire. She thinks optimistic nihilism is underrated.

Plain Clothes

By: Jack Milne

Great workout tonight, Ray Swanson thought to himself as he climbed the well-worn, paint-splattered wooden stairs of the boxing gym. This was his Friday ritual – two hours of intense circuit training to work up a hefty sweat, and the occasional joust in the ring at the end if he was feeling particularly stressed – which always helped to clear his head after stewing away in front of a computer screen all week.

Ray worked in a call center in Glasgow, one of the inconspicuous office blocks around George Square that blend into the surrounding architecture like plainclothes police officers. Like most others in that field, he enjoyed the pay, but fucking hated the job.

He reached the top of the stairs and was confronted by the busy street. Nervously, almost involuntarily, he glanced down the street to his right before heading off to the left; he had a destination in mind.

He checked himself out in almost every window he passed. After the workout he'd taken a quick shower and changed into a pair of skinny navy chinos, a fresh pair of Sambas, and his favorite blue-and-white striped cotton shirt, buttoned up to the throat. His hair was cut short, slightly shorter at the back and sides and he'd ran just a touch of wax through it to give the impression of nonchalance. He nodded to his own reflection.

He could feel his phone buzzing in his pocket. He fished it out, checked the screen and felt his own buzz diminishing: Murdo Calling.

"Fuck sake, man," Ray said aloud, frustrated, "can they no last two minutes without me!" He gave a one-two glance around him, took a deep breath and answered.

"What's happenin', Murdo, ma man?" his voice, theatrically loud and obnoxious, revealed nothing of the irritation that clung to him. "Youz need yer auld da there to buy youz a drink eh!"

"Swanny, man!" Murdo replied in his nasally, heavy East Kilbride accent. "Where are you? The lads are all here, the pints are in!"

"Aye, I'm on ma way boys, just got some business to take care of eh," Ray said, catching the eyes of his reflection.

"Ha ha! Aye I get you, Swanny, nae worries, geez a text and I'll have a cold ain waitin' on you with open arms."

"Fuckin' better, mate!" Ray said and hung up.

Perfect timing. Standing at the entrance to a cocktail bar was a tall, well-groomed man in a black polo shirt tucked into light-washed skinny jeans. His black hair had been combed back into immaculate, glistening trenches and he raised slick eyebrows as Ray approached.

"Your *pals*, I assume?" he said, the question dripping with irony.

"Aye, I'm sorry," Ray replied sheepishly, and they embraced in an almost textbook man hug, awkward in its tenderness.

"How long do I have you for tonight, then?" the well-groomed man asked with a sad sigh, shaking his head but maintaining indulgent eye contact. "Are you ever going to tell them, your *pals*?"

"At least an hour," said Ray, dropping his head. "I'm sorry, Paul, I really am. I promise I will, just... Not yet, not tonight."

Paul gave a half-hearted smile, "It's okay, let's head down. I can hear a couple Aperol Spritz calling our names," he said, leaning his head towards the stairs with raised eyebrows and pushing his ear out slightly with an index finger.

Ray looked up with a smile like sunrise, and as they retreated into the safety of the doorway, they clasped hands, kissed, and descended the red velvety stairs towards the dark comfort of the cocktail bar.

A few empty cocktail glasses later, Ray and Paul were sat on cushion-topped benches at the bar, laughing away, oblivious to anything and anyone outside of their cozy little orbit. The oil lamps suspended by bronze-painted chains above them cast a warm glow on the back of their hands resting on the bar that would connect and retreat as naturally as the ebb and flow of the tides.

Just as a pair of frosted martini glasses were placed in front of them, Ray felt that unbearable buzz in his pocket. His smile darkened as he silenced it through his jeans.

"Out of time, I suppose?" Paul said, with an edge of spite, taking a long sip.

Ray couldn't look him in the eye. Instead, he picked up his glass and turned in his stool to lean against the bar with both elbows, exhaled slowly and took a sip.

Just as the glass reached his lips, he froze and felt his heart plummet into uncharted depths.

"Swanny!" one of his pals, Mitch, exclaimed loudly as he swaggered towards him. "No your usual habitat, eh no?"

He slapped Ray amiably on the shoulder, a huge grin dominating his face.

"Didnae ken you were pals wi Murdo's wee cousin! How you doin', Paul?"

Paul was sitting stiffly, eyes pinballing from Mitch to Ray. "Emm... not bad, Mitch, not bad. What are you doing here?"

"Cheeky bastard, eh!" Mitch laughed, and gently elbowed Paul in the ribs.

"On a date with a wee Tinder number, tidy like!" He thrust his thumb over his right shoulder, and Ray's eyes focused on a table in the corner almost shrouded in darkness, occupied by a woman in a red dress. Her features appeared haunted by the pathetic flicker of a lone candle as she smiled and waved over to them.

Mitch gave them a once over, "So, what are youz up..." he suddenly stiffened, eyes widening as he slowly clocked the numerous empty glasses, their intimate proximity, "are youz... on a date?"

Paul sat frozen, slowly swirling his glass on the bar with his fingertips.

Ray was sinking. He laughed nervously and took a long, awkward sip of his drink. Just as he was about to attempt some joke to pass it off, he met Paul's eyes, pleading him on, and once again felt the thunderous buzz from the phone in his pocket.

His anger surged, "Fuck it, aye! We're on a fuckin' date, you happy? Go and tell the boys their pal, Swanny, is intae men, is intae fucking men! I'm sick ae hiding it, I'm sick ae..."

"Woah woah, easy, mate!" Mitch said putting his hands on Ray's shoulders to calm him down. "We're no bothered aboot that, mate. To be honest, we've thought it for ages!" He laughed a little and shook his head, "We just werny sure if we should ask or not, thought you might've taken it the wrong way, ken?"

Ray was paralyzed. Shock and relief tore through him like a hurricane, eradicating the fear and doubt he'd been hoarding for years, piece by piece. A wave of euphoria soon followed and gently crashed over him, bathing him in a cozy release of tension. Finally shedding that lingering, gnawing anxiety, Ray wanted nothing more than to just close his eyes and devour the moment. He shook his head slowly and grinned. *Fuck sake, man.*

Paul smiled and downed his drink.

"Mon, gents," Mitch said, wrapping his arms around both their necks and bringing them into a close huddle, "let's get a few drinks in, then go meet the boys and celebrate, they'll be chuffed!" He leaned in closer to Ray, a mischievous grin dancing onto his lips, "Murdo wilny be too happy about you pumpin' his wee cousin, but!"

About the Author Jack Milne is a Scottish writer currently living in Glasgow. His main influences include Irvine Welsh, Iain Banks, Aldous Huxley and Haruki Murakami.

Jaxon Ostrer

About the Artist

Jaxon Ostrer is a 16-year-old high school junior and has been passionate about art and photography for a long time. He lives in Washington state and has 2 dogs. He was pushed to showcase his photography because of his amazing girlfriend, who always encourages him to do new things.



Mindscape
2141 x 2604 pixels
Digital art / photography

consumption / disruption \ foundation

By: Mia Golden

textile wisdom stitched into your
forearm; these pungent truths
threaten to consume you.
the commonwealth: tendrils of
animosity constricting windpipes;
correlation declared war on causation
and gunpowder coats your vocal chords.
feverish agitation: you're soaked in sudor
and sorrow; fight the delusions, remain alert.
eggshell madness penetrates through the
acid haze; puncture wounds leave gauges
in their wake. constant vigilance, and the
raking of your nails down the leather principles
your house was built on; the foundations
are gone and you've never felt more afloat.

synchronicity

By: Mia Golden

I malleability

you always notice the broken ribs first; the semblances of reality that prickle under melanin, bits of bone molding into your chest wall; you were born in black-&-white but long to dance under the rainbow stars; may the moon eclipse from the uniform luminosity & you'd drag your feet through the sands of time: her name is on your lips & the syllables kindle a fire in your trachea, leaving you to struggle against the troubling taciturnity; the kind humanity mists onto plants with water droplets, the kind that spills prismatic kisses against the skin; & you want to sing like her, breathe like her, be like her, but you cannot, for:

II anonymity

those adhesive labels that haunt you cannot touch you here: sticking to your forehead & ripping out tiny hairs on your scalp; you anoint your fingernails in ultraviolet; drown the monochrome in acetone, wave your flag from atop a rainbow throne; levity lasts longer from beneath your illusive veil; the words are epiphanies, calamities of the good & bad, for your inquiries have diminished, leaving these massive "wonderings" to crush you in their quad-syllabic glory; the namelessness, the invisibility, it is your only vice, so you grasp it tight between perse knuckles, longing for:

III simplicity

you wonder how you know all the answers, save for the ones that matter most; musicality, for you long to harmonize with the discovery that illudes your rose-tipped fingers; originality, so your sonnets & sestinas may echo across the globe; toxicity, for your flesh is disintegrating between hyaline deprecations; & you hope that your femininity & authenticity don't bleed together, for then you'd be left to rely on serendipity &:

IV synchronicity

so, you're not drowning alone, but who will save you from sinking into this roiling entity of identity?

About the Author

Mia Golden is a student poet from California. A knit sweater enthusiast, activist, and dog lover, Mia loves the complex simplicity that language, particularly poetry, presents. She is forthcoming in the Blue Marble Review and is published in the Trouvaille Review.

I feel the words crawling up my spine,
entangled
by cobwebs I have been weaving
in my throat.

I let those words dissolve
till their existence
ceases to hold any meaning,
I let them melt, and
I drape them around my tongue
like the sun guttering into
the ocean of poison.

My throat feels like a flower
slit at its stalk,
gasping for breath
when buried amidst the poems
that sleep silently
in their coffins.

The flames of the fire burning
Beneath my flesh
sometimes resemble flickering candles
but most of the time it is a wildfire.
My charred flesh is only
A few wildfires away from
crumbling into ashes.
The rising and falling of flames
creating a symphony that
sounds melodious no longer.

I loathe the figure on
the other side of the mirror
mortified at its ability to speak,
but never say enough.
I am a rope of despair and dejection
wrapped around nothing
over and over again until
it resembles a human form.
The stacks of unsaid words
churn like a windmill
in circles of solitude,
inside my abdomen
I breathe, I bleed.

I strangle my feelings
right in their infancy so
as I peel away the
auburn layers of my heart
the escaping asphyxiant will turn
my body into a gas chamber and
your fingertips too
would taste like a holocaust.

The Massacre of Silence

By: Kavya Agarwal

About the Author

Kavya Agarwal is a literature student from India, a freelance writing professional, budding spoken word artist, published author, and poet most of all. Her debut poetry book "The Fragile World" was published in 2019. She's working as a Staff Editor at Second Revolution Literary Magazine and as a Poetry Reader at Lazy Adventurer Publishing House. Her work has also been published in The Evergreen Journal, From The Heart Magazine and The Nightingale Poetry.

Do You Still?

By: Brittney Uecker

*Contains depictions of drug use and sexual content

“Be careful with that shit.”

His words materialized as tiny puffs, smoke mixing with the chilled condensation of a winter breath. Somehow his teeth were still white, straight, orthodontically perfect.

I looked to the pills in my hand, floating and naked and untethered in my palm. Not in a baggie or a bottle, hinting at freedom or haste. If I squinted, they looked like Tic Tacs or baby teeth.

“Yeah, yeah, okay.”

I wasn’t about to take advice from a drug dealer. He was clearly not an economist, otherwise, he would have suggested I eat them like candy then come quickly back for more. Maybe he just didn’t want to kill me, which is an economic strategy in its own right. It was sort of sweet, I guess.

Money exchanged hands, and I was unsure what to do with the pills. I could deposit them in my pocket where they would get lost in the folds or freefall onto a grimy bathroom floor when I pulled down my pants. For a second, tossing them all into my mouth seemed like the safest option. I bounced on my toes in the chill of the dank alley, the pills dancing in my wide-open palm, communion-style. From the outside, you’d be unsure who was offering and who was receiving.

“You look good, Bri,” he said through clouds. He looked me up and down, not with a gawking sexual eye but pure observation. A scientist or an artist or an appraiser.

I wondered if he would recognize me. I had known it was him the second I saw his gangly silhouette approaching me through the puddles of streetlights. It had been fifteen years, and while I had expanded and contracted and become more opaque in the intervening time, Parker looked nearly the same, hardly altered by the unforgiving hand of manhood.

The silence between us was excruciating, the grievous pain of social inelegance. The possible responses pinged wildly through my head - play dumb, admit my instant recognition, act unfazed, walk away. He hesitated, his cigarette halfway to his open mouth, paused, an awkward position that could only signal interruption or waiting. I wished that I’d retained the weight I’d gained in college or chopped all my hair off, anything to make me unrecognizable from the last time I’d seen him.

We began talking at the exact same moment so that our overlapping words came out garbled and inaudible.

“Thank y—”

“Sorry, I—”

The bumbled start-stopping, making this encounter all the more intolerable. I hated when dealers tried to make conversation, tried to make our interaction anything more than transactional. If I hadn’t been going into this blind, the result of a referral from a friend of a friend, I wouldn’t have been caught so off-guard, but I hadn’t expected this ghost of my past to show up with my pills jiggling loosely in his hands. His hands were nice now, normal, adult, no chipped black nail polish or the silly tattoos we’d scrawl on each other with ball-point pen, markers of our fledgling romance or perceived ownership, as much as teenagers can manage to be harnessed by anybody.

The last time I saw him all those years ago, my lips were still chapped from kissing him. I still wore the underwear from the night before, the black cotton panties

This clearly meant more to me than to him, as it had before.

As I walked away, clicking the pills between my fingers in my pocket, I wondered whether I'd see him in another fifteen years, when I needed a reminder of when I was innocent and passionate and reverent, or in a day or two, when I needed more drugs to feel those things in vain.

About the Author

Brittney Uecker is a youth librarian and writer living in rural Montana. Her work has been published by Waste Division, Stone of Madness Press, and Unpublishable Zine and is forthcoming for Second Chance Lit and Pages Penned in a Pandemic. She is currently working on her first novel. She is @bonesandbeer on Twitter and Instagram.

Liberty

By: Simon Daley

*...Give me your tired, your poor,
your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
the wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
- Emma Lazarus, "The New Colossus"*

She stands free, on her own, yet never alone, as she invites visitors, who freely take advantage of her open nature. Homeric Helen may well have launched a thousand ships, but this lady has harbored home multitudes more. Those unlanded seven sea sailors, come from all points, to view her crowning glory as seeing all "exiles" equal. Conceived to be found, forever in her finery, she is an island, perpetual purity, in tides of plastic popularity. Judgement of Paris; she is the *doyenne* of French couture, her timeless style would grace any forum of little Italy. The ultimate *émigrée*, she basks Verdigris, guiding friends from darkness with golden flame. Forever stepping forward from shackles to freedom, she shields her liberation from those who would hem and hector her "huddled masses" with chains. A beacon in a land sought by so many pilgrims, she holds her torch to dim tyrants near and far. The rushed "golden door" she illuminates, remains ajar, between walls old, new and thus far imagined. Her ostentatious neighbors build ever higher mirrors trying to trump one another and catch her "mild eyes." Born of revolution, the personification of resolution, she stands firm, her towering gaze settling on the worthy, not those who merely grow wealth to measure worth. Stoically silent, she shamelessly fronts this, her land, fathered for the free, built on the bare black backs of those whose liberty, was bought and paid for, by cottoned on masters who blew such sweet smoke.

About the Author

Simon Daley is a proud Father who served as a Police Officer in Scotland for 30 years fighting crime, injustice, racism and stupidity. He is now working with young people to help them achieve and be the best version of themselves. His poetry has been previously published at Nine Muses Poetry and his haiku appeared in a wonderful collaborative piece by Orange County Museum of Art.

Wednesday's News

By: Danae Younge

A celebrity drowned in serenity,
& I cannot unread it.

Her boat quivered from lifted weight
when she dove into a mid-day swim.

They found her 4-year-old son alone,
pontoon roped down by his gaze
to the murk as

a torrid throat dispensed
crisp photographs—
sapphire usurping her complexion
& furtive devils donning basic masks,
translucent spheres atop her scalp
before collapsing flat,
exposing her cold as film.

Sitting in my room,
I can't help but feel the ellipses
bubbling up a neutral corn silk
hue from the trellis

as the wallpaper curls in,
as the wooden skeleton plots
to birth another.

About the Author

Danae Younge is a biracial writer currently pursuing a BA in English with a creative writing track at Occidental College. Her work is published and forthcoming in Pulp Poets Press, Vita Brevis Magazine, Palette Point, Susquehanna Review, Rogue Agent Journal, Mason Street Magazine, and others. She was a national winner selected by the Live Poets Society of New Jersey and placed third in the It's All Write international poetry competition. You can read more of Danae's writing at www.danaeyounge.com and follow her on Instagram: @danae_celeste_

Penelope Keith

the brandywine
36 x 24

Acrylic on board, digitally manipulated



About the Artist

Penelope Keith has been a painter for many years, inspired by nature and ecological themes, turning only recently to abstract expressionism as a deep source of inspiration from Rothko and Joan Mitchell. Her work is done with acrylics on wood – often ordinary plywood, which has a grain that lends itself beautifully to sunsets and skies. The pieces are often irregular in shape or have ragged edges, which adds to the texture of the piece. Although she sands them, she leaves the wood more or less in its own state. She finds wood to be more satisfying to work on than canvas.



color study yellow on orange
36 x 24
Acrylic on board, digitally manipulated



color study blue on red
36 x 24
Acrylic on board, digitally manipulated

Cape No. 7

By: Alicia Hsu

*Inspired by the movie Cape No. 7 (2008).

distance whittled us into mere love letters
puddles of guilt, tear stains on paper
folded one too many times.
you wallow in a sorrow that i long to feel
foolish; as if after all this time our bodies are connected somehow.

our words peel off stamped pages
fluttering into the ocean between us
soaked handwriting in the mouths of fish
and moving on is almost as painful
as the bird of hope we gave birth to.

somewhere in the universe
we are watching our sentences
fall victim to the salt-drowned sea
and hating the sun.

the casino

By: Alicia Hsu

i live in a palace of indigo
where dusk is dawn, the sun ever in limbo.
i watch hands wave away the ghost of cigarette smoke
and pull joysticks like lollipops from toddlers' mouths.
fervent arcade voices prick at mothers
who usher their children away, afraid of the way it calls them.
still, i fall for its beckoning into
endless time; a choked hourglass
slowly sifting sand as it holds my foot to the pedal.
i see my future in the grey man staring blankly
at rolling gold coins and sangria cherries.
this isn't home yet, but it could be, and
greed chases luck into my hollow belly
as i grasp at sunlight straws—
carving away my soul, washing up
on the shores of glory.

About the Author

Alicia Hsu is a high school senior in New York. Her work has appeared in Eunoia Review, Skipping Stones Magazine, and more. When she isn't writing down her thoughts, you can find her escaping in a fantasy novel or walking her two dogs.

Quitting Party

By: Adam Ells

They manage to get seats at a place on Denman. Callum's buzzed enough that he doesn't know what it's called, but Andy led them in. The five of them manage to find a table, squeezing in shoulder-to-shoulder. Callum finds himself facing across from Jane. He tries to strike up a conversation with her, which is difficult because the tables are so wide and the bar so loud.

"How's your new place?" he asks. Jane and Andy recently moved in together.

"What?" Jane says.

He repeats himself.

"Oh, it's fine," she says. We have a few little—" and the rest is lost as the beat swells.

The bar is dimly lit, like most bars. Waitresses glide back and forth in that practiced, quick calm that any good server has mastered. Callum likes to watch people at work. He watches the bar patrons, trying to pick up on the little gestures that people give, signals when the music's too loud and you've drank enough and you want to tell someone how you feel with your body instead of words. At the same time, he feels Emi's bare leg against his. It's smooth and sticky. They've been outside all day at the beach. Everyone is sweaty, tugging shirts from bodies. Callum tries to focus in on a conversation. Andy and Manny are debating the merits of various coffee-making techniques. They all work at the same coffee shop. Callum can tell the difference between good coffee and bad, but it doesn't go much farther than that.

"French press is the best," Manny says. He's tall and black, with a high fade and a cosmopolitan accent that tilts across Europe. He just started at the cafe. "Filters absorb too much. The purity is retained in press. It still percolates in your cup."

Andy nods, crossing his arms. "Yeah, but there's not as much precision as with a pour over or..."

Andy looks like he values precision. He's fit and handsome, and his hair is perfectly pomaded. An elegant black tattoo sleeve shows under his tee-shirt. Callum watches him. The way he crosses his arms and considers Manny's question. The way he drinks his beer, somehow in perfectly-sized sips. Callum doesn't think he's ever seen perfectly-sized sips before, but Andy has mastered them. Unconsciously, or maybe a little consciously, Callum adjusts himself, sitting a little more like Andy, who has his arm casually draped over Manny's shoulders. He wants to brush his hair into a perfect part, but it's too long.

"You've worked at the cafe for a while right?" Jane asks.

Callum says he has. Nearly two years now. Time flies when you're living paycheck-to-paycheck.

"You must like it then," Jane says.

Callum shrugs. "It's alright," he says. "This summer's definitely been the best."

Jane looks surprised. "Really?" she says.

"Yeah," Callum says. "I like you guys."

She turns to Emi. "How do you like Vancouver?"

"I love it!" Emi says. "I've never lived in a city so close to nature before. So many nice parks, and the cherry blossoms."

Jane seems disappointed by this answer. Emi looks at Callum with a little smile.

They stand under the awning of an apartment building. Emi calls a cab. Callum sits down on a bench. He feels a little dizzy. Emi sits down beside him, rubbing her legs with her hands. "It was a good day," she says.

"I'm going to miss you," Callum says.

She doesn't say anything for a moment, and Callum looks out. For a moment, it seems like he can see the rain, sheeting over the entire city.

"I'm going to miss you too."

The cab pulls up. Emi goes to it, but Callum stays on the bench. "You're going south," he says when she turns back. "I'm going east. I'll catch the night bus."

She's got her hand on the door of the cab. Her pink shirt and jean shorts are dark with rainwater. "Get in the cab, Callum."

About the Author

Adam Ells is a writer living in Vancouver, Canada. He is currently attending the creative writing program at Douglas College. When not writing, he can be found playing pickup basketball, playing tabletop RPGs, and of course, reading.



I'll Be Home for Christmas
Elwing Gao
8.5 x 11
Marker

By: Mattie Richards

Stumbling

Phosphorus orange
The puddles on the street shine
A violent stab of color
Amongst greys and shadows
Boots disturb the settled rain
Scattering light

Darting glances across empty streets,
A stark silence
Leaving room for things to escalate
Blood pumping in the brain,
Pounding the temples
Tipsy thoughts scream
Eyes tearing up in orange
Phosphorus glow

Lost in the bleeding refracted light
My head is saturated
Like the streetlights looking condescendingly down
Overcrowding my personal space
Hands cramping against the stifling air
A numbness which burns
A cold that makes your lip snarl
The moon, an operating theatre light
Over my iodine soaked skin
Entering my bloodstream

My eyes are tired
Sick of it,
Until I can take these thoughts off
And bathe in the darkness of my bedroom,
In heavy silence
When will I stop counting events?
And obsessing over
What I said
Not knowing where to stop
Scattering

About the Author

Mattie Richards is a recent music graduate currently focusing on singing, show development, and releasing a music review blog called Chime Out.

Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall

By: Trisha Khattar

"You're with a woman."

"Yes."

"In... love. *Pyaar*."

"I— that's complicated."

"How?"

Curled up on the seat of the toilet in the aftermath of The Argument with tear-stained cheeks, I know what he's asking and yet I don't respond right away.

"I don't know," I murmur, freely handing over the ammunition he needs to rip me apart. It's 1 a.m. and at this point, I just want to hear his voice. The night feels like the moment the music turns off at a dance and you're snapped back into reality, of days painted in a midnight blue before a night of blinding beautiful red. Today the strokes of the brush are rough, color a darker shade closer to black.

I need this today. Everything is healthy in moderation, right? I haven't looked into the mirror of this bathroom in weeks. I deserve this.

"You don't know. So you're not in love with a woman?" he remarks, quite predictably. He raises one eyebrow, looking down at me. It's apparent in the scorn of his faint smirk that for once, he's glad to have something over me.

Petty, I understand. It must be genetic.

"What do you want to hear, Kabir?" I ask. "Yes, I'm in love with a woman? She seduced me, drew me away to the dark side. I bet that's it."

The smile slides slowly off of his face.

"Or no, I'm not in love with her because—what is it you say, again? *Aise nahin hota*," he flinches as if the words are a knife at his throat, and they are. I intend them to be. *This is not how it's done, Ananya*. I giggle a little hysterically.

"This woman... She loves you?" he asks, eyes indecipherable.

I fix my gaze on the bottle of toothpaste up on the counter, idly noting that it's running out. I know I had written it on the list I gave Maya when she left to buy groceries last Saturday. We had just fought, I remember. Her clenched and brows furrowed, words sharp and biting. The corner of the crumpled stained post-it peeking from her clenched fist and her soft voice when she paused in the doorway, *I can feel you pulling away*.

Maybe I should text her now.

But I know that when she comes back, smile as wide as her arms, she'll pull me in to tuck my face into the curve of her throat. Her hand will inch upward to the hem of my shirt. Her fingers will brush the underside of my bra. She'll kiss my neck, fingers a steady pressure at my waist, a light pull downward at my pants, and—

A sickening feeling will well up in my gut. I know how this will begin and I know how it will end, but I won't have it in me to stomach it. So I'll pull away gently, missing the comfort of her embrace already. I'll wrap my hands around her wrist where her hand slid under my underwear. The hurt in her eyes will catch on my heart, but she'll brush it off the way she did yesterday, and the day before that, and the day before that. I'll let her.

I see the way the girl in her 11 a.m. class (glistening blonde hair, soft melody, like the whole world halts at her voice) looks at her, how she's fallen in love with Maya. I don't fault her for it. She can't love her more than me. She doesn't know Maya's laugh as I do, not her deepest secrets or the way she slides up to the counter at night on days when the power cuts out, curling in to make herself smaller so she doesn't hit her head on the broken cupboards. She doesn't know how her quiet smile steals my breath away, even barely visible in the flickering candlelight.

But neither Kabir nor the girl know how much Maya loves me. Even when I struggle to breathe most days, when the world has slipped into a passing whim, she loves me. When I'm adrift amidst panicked hysteria and lifeless calm, deafening clamor and pin-drop silence leaving behind nothing but scratched bloody cuticles and torn out hair, her voice pulls the storm away. She cups the swirling winds and heavy rain in her steady hands and tells me *I love you I love you I love you* until the clouds above our heads are the only sign of catastrophe left.

But what does love matter if I flinch at her every suggestive touch? If every instinct I've ever ignored screams Bloody Mary at the caress of her fingers near my thighs? I do let her touch me like she wants to sometimes. She'll bite, moan my name, whisper exactly what she wants to do to me and I'll let my fingers grip her hips the way hers grip mine (tight but not too tight, fingers spread, move your hands back and forth). My face will turn to the ceiling as she climbs over me again. I won't be able to look at her. I'll squeeze my eyes shut, search within me for the answer to a question I've been asking for my whole life — *why can't I just be normal?* It's childish and juvenile, something out of a teen novel, but it strikes true.

As she mouths at my neck now, teeth scratching the skin lightly, I try to muster anything more than mild disgust. Flutter my eyes as if I won't spend a half hour staring numbly at the hickey the next day, resisting the urge to vomit.

“—Ananya?”

My eyes flicker to Kabir instantly. “It's Anya,” I say sharply.

“*Accha?*” He raises an eyebrow. *Really?* “It's Ananya,” he corrects. “I know your type, wasting your life away drunk and —” his eyes flicker to the bottle of pills on the counter and he clenches his jaw, “— God knows what else. Going by some white name, sauntering around with - with girls in some kind of rebellion — I know your type. You're pathetic.”

A bout of bitter laughter escapes me. It's a familiar feeling, this ball of incredulity and this isn't fair wound tightly in my chest until I can't find where the anger ends and despair begins. It unfurls now, spills out from my chest, climbs up my throat.

“You think you have the right to call me pathetic?” I hiss. “I don't know, Kabir, you don't seem as if you're in a very favorable position to cast judgments on being pathetic right now.” I stand up from the seat of the toilet and lean into the mirror, my breath fogging up his neck on the glass. “Or are you not the same man who drove his daughter away?”

“You don't know anything about me or my daughter,” he spits, crossing his arms petulantly.

“And you don't know anything about me. So shut the fuck up and go back to wherever it is you go when you're not in my fucking mirror.”

His eyes flash. “My daughter was misguided, I simply set her straight.”

“Set her straight? She ran away from you — don't pretend you knew her, you knew *nothing* about her! She hated you and your condescending lectures and your blatant ignorance and your stupid family's Indian values, *she hated you!*”

The mirror shatters at the edges, thin cracks spreading like dominos to the edge of his face. The darkness behind him pushes forward and his face twists with rage, eyes squinted, nostrils flaring. I stumble back into the cabinet, banging my head on the edge of its open door. Rows of shampoo bottles and razors scatter around me, clattering against the floor and sink.

“My daughter loved—loves—me, she’s been led astray. You’re nothing like her, *meri beti*, she’s a good girl—” he cries desperately. *My daughter*. The darkness pulls him back into the mirror at last, and his voice cuts off, leaving the bathroom silent.

I slide down the cabinet, trembling. My head throbs. I wince as my hand comes back wet and sticky after I gingerly touch the back of my head.

The mirror clears a little, cracks and darkness gone, to reflect my face. I exhale shakily, ignore the dark circles, the bone-deep exhaustion in my eyes. The fading echo of my father’s voice rings incessantly in my ears. The imprint of his face still lingers on the dirty glass.

This time it was my fault, I tell myself firmly, I lost my temper too early. I’ve missed him.

Meri beti, she’s a good girl.

Wiping my eyes with the backs of my hands, I tilt my head, watching my reflection smile back brightly. My lips remain flat. She waves, raises her eyebrows at the toilet in a gentle reminder. I nod. Her figure blurs until it disappears completely.

On my way out of the bathroom, I pause at the toilet and reach for the nearly empty bottle of pills on the bathroom counter my father had been glancing at and tilt the oblong disks into the bowl. The toilet clunks as the pills swirl down into the sewer. We’d have to get that fixed, too, I remind myself, the noise was quickly becoming annoying.

I decide to leave my makeup the way it is, smeared and dripping; Maya will be back soon. She’ll take one look at me and apologize, fawn over my drawn face and smudged eyeliner with her hands pressed delicately to my cheeks. Maybe we would have sex. I think I could handle that today.

It’s alright, I’ll assure her when she asks the next morning if I took my dose yesterday, I can afford to miss a day or two now.

About the Author

Trisha Khattar is a writer, journalist, and podcaster at Amador Valley High School in Pleasanton, California. She believes in the power of writing as a tool of self-expression and change and hopes to harness that power for good in the future. Her work has been in a COVID-19 anthology published by Writopia Labs, and her scriptwriting has been recognized by the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. She is editor-in-chief and co-founder of her local teen literary magazine.

constellations

By: Anoushka Kumar

[cassiopeia] will sing to you from northern striped clouds; opening wide to these knitted symphonies cutting a velvet sky. this scarab-beetled beauty may numb your blemished disasters. vanity will precede her, or at least that's what the nebulae say (even the faeries among a limned-blue moon). poseidon, with his triple glances and reflective abrasiveness will stand aloof after his sentence. she dare not call this her downfall; andromeda will be chided by her as dusk laps up the ocean waves. celestial daughters fear nereids, after all. don't look to the north star if you feel yourself falter, but keep on, one flattened soul after another. maybe you will find the crescents bleeding into the milky way, ascending upwards. maybe you will find gamma's reindeer guiding her to perseus, seeking gossamer refuge among the rocks.

[lyra] is carved in vulcan fires and neon-streaked binaries, watching eagle-eyed as midnight calls upon the creatures stalking gently. a tortoise shell, as offering from hermes himself—a gateway to the half-bloods. midsummer erupts around a fallen scavenger: a sacrifice like no other. to pray, to feed upon her weaknesses. aster plays the lyre, blessed tunes dripping like shooting stars from her cherubic neck. summer nights awakening these triadic memories, hands circling around bonfires. complexity flowing like orpheus's citran melodies, breathing life into the wild but swaying the sirens, all aboard sailing to many a driftwood lad. from this prodigal's mouth a string of spears are drawn. novae bringing the muses to a halt, where this troubled demigod will turn in his soil-laden grave, never forgotten.

[ursa major] lies in patterns, etched in the stars. a gazelle, leaping towards the horizon rips the moon into half—tiptoes around a crater and passes by a wheat plough. heptagonal spheres branch out: jade, pearl, and amethyst all through the night. three huntsmen search for revenge, slain graybears. their hindquarters dipping into ladled asterisms. alioth strikes, mizar, peach-eyed and alkaid with sustenance. stepping stones through spreading rivulets, wayward sons skipping up to a lily pad. unfortunate deliberation in constant ecstasy, is motherly blessed. ursus is lowered to gaia's depths, where a salmon weir is snatched to a mammal's forelegs. goryeo pulls these linen curtains to a close. callisto's odyssey stays afloat in violet horizons. the wain will show you the way.

About the Author

Anoushka Kumar (she/her) is a student and writer from India, with work forthcoming or published in the Heritage Review, the Bitter Fruit Review, Kalopsia Lit, Ayaskala and elsewhere. She is also on the editorial team of Cathartic Lit, Gossamer Lit, and the Interstellar Review. When not writing, she can be found listening to Phoebe Bridgers, crying over poetry, and debating the queerness of complex female characters.

Audiation

By: Jerica Taylor

I almost buy a keyboard on Friday morning; a digital one with weighted keys that serves up sound like a real piano, for the sole satisfaction of learning to play a song stuck on repeat in my head. When I was small, I could copy a tune I'd only heard once. My parents hoped it meant I was gifted, and hired a tutor. The fluttery sheets of music made me tense. It soothed me to pick out on the cracked keys what rumbled inside. I recall with a spread palm the stretch of my pinkies and thumbs to reach the farthest keys and the confusion when a six year old outplayed me right before I quit. I thought you were good or you weren't, you had the skill or you didn't, and sitting on that unbalanced scale left me perpetually hungry. I have swung too wildly to the opposite amplitude, denial to overindulgence, for what I was not allowed then and wish to feed myself now. Impulsively, I click Add to Cart on an instrument meant for musicians and not sad little grown up girls who only want to pound the keys, call forth chords deep and sweet, a glissando to slide out of danger just in time. I don't complete the purchase, but it sits open in a tab. You could have this, if you really needed it, I sing to the frightened face of a younger self. No one could say no. Together we could play for as long as we want, until our melodies reintegrate.

About the Author

Jerica Taylor is a non-binary neurodivergent queer cook, birder, and chicken herder. Their work has appeared in Postscript, Stone of Madness Press, Feral Poetry, and perhappened. She lives with her wife and young daughter in Western Massachusetts. Twitter @jericatruly

Abattis

By: Jerica Taylor

***Contains depictions of sexual abuse**

I told the middle-aged
couple wearing matching anchor
print collared shirts and leather boat
shoes at the art gallery in the city
that he was my brother.

I knew that I was not supposed
to tell anyone anything in that wide
open maze of hallways. We were
here to be inspired, not pry
into one another's naivete.

Together the four of us
contemplated Rodin's abattis.
Wire and clay and limbs;
less person, more part.

In the museum café my brother
bought me coffee and
read me poetry and
longed to draw me nude.

The charcoal would see me down
to the bones. My clavicle, his favorite.
The musty attic the only place the six-foot
stretch of paper would fit, was too hot
to tolerate that summer, even

stripped down. Instead we
spent most of our time together
on the porch in the dark with my head
on his chest. I was old
enough, but he was older.

If the man who was not my brother
slipped his hand up the back
of my flowy linen shirt like Rodin
had touched his lady visitors, aching

to travel into the eternal tunnel,
the nautical couple would not be able
to parse the gesture through
the sculpture's bent legs.

Lavender

By: Lujain Assaf

*Contains depiction of child abuse and neglect, alcohol abuse, and domestic abuse

** Originally published in Ice Lolly Review

The first thing I saw was purple. An endless sea of purple. It was a lavender field, but I thought we found fairyland.

I scrambled to the window and squinted as best as I could with my poor eyesight to find fairies, thinking that their purple dresses were blending in with the lavender. But Dad was driving so fast that when he hit the brakes, I toppled off of my seat. The car door next to me swung open, letting in the cool air of the afternoon.

Dad looked down at me. I was so dizzy from my fall that I saw three of him. He reeked from all the beer he usually drowned himself in. He then dragged me out of the car and planted me on the side of the road. That caused the dizziness to worsen, but I didn't tell him that.

Not letting go of my arms, he kneeled down to my eye level. He looked serious, which was rare. He was always either goofy or scary, depending on how many drinks he had had. He crinkled his eyes and tried to give me a kind smile, but his yellow teeth ruined that effect.

"Okay, sweetie, I need you—" He sneezed, right into my face. I wanted to wipe my face, but when I tried to move my arms, he held them down. "Sorry, honey, allergies."

"Allergies?"

"The flowers make me sick," he explained to me gently, his nails digging into my arms. "Which is why I need you to go into the field and get Mommy. Did you already forget?"

Of course I had already forgotten because I was seven years old, but I had learned how not to piss him off. "No, Dad," I replied, relieved when I didn't stutter. He hated when I did that.

His grip on my arms slightly loosened, but his nails were still digging into my skin. "And do you remember what you have to tell Mommy?"

"Yes, Dad."

Finally, he let go of my arms and turned me to the field. "Go get her," he commanded, pushing me forward.

That would have been an easy task if I had any idea where Mom was. Dad failed to give me any directions. The flowers towered over me, making it hard to see where I was going, yet I didn't dare turn back. I walked blindly into the field. Once I felt far away enough from him, I quietly called out for Mom.

Time passed quickly as I wandered through the lavender field. The sun was already setting, which frightened me. Not because it was getting dark or because I couldn't find Mom, but because I didn't want Dad to lose his patience and punish me.

As if a miracle was sent from God, I finally got a response to my calls.

"Talia? Is that you?"

"Mom!" I squealed and ran in the direction of her voice. It should have been a beautiful, heartwarming reunion with the sunset and lavender. Instead, I found her drunk and lying on the ground with a bottle in her hand. She smelled worse than Dad. There was lavender in her hair and her clothes were stained with dirt and alcohol. She looked like a fairy princess that had been trampled on by filthy trolls.

When she saw me, she sat up slightly and gave me a lazy smile. "You found me," she slurred, raising the bottle in the air as if she was giving a toast, but then she fell back down.

The sight of her made my stomach twist, not because she was drunk beyond reason, but because I had no idea how I would get her back to Dad. If I didn't, I would be the one punished alongside her. I stood over her, hoping she would say more, but she took another sip from her bottle and spilled liquor onto her face and shirt. She looked up at me, but I felt like she was looking through me. She was in her own fairyland.

“Dad wants to tell you something.”

My words interested her as she actually sat up properly and looked at me, her eyes wide. I couldn't tell if the shine in her eyes was hope or terror.

“Dad is sorry and loves you and wants you to come home.”

I waited, foolishly expecting Mom to suddenly sober up, grab my hand, and skip through the lavender field into Dad's open arms.

“That's it? That's his great speech?” She scowled and took another sip from her bottle before lying down.

I panicked and tried to remember if there was anything else Dad told me to say, but if there had been, I forgot it. So, I told her something else Dad had muttered in the car—in hopes that it would fix everything.

It had the opposite effect.

Mom slapped me so hard that she knocked me to the ground, but she barely gave me a glance. She stood up and spun around as if looking for something. When she finally stopped spinning, she narrowed her eyes and pointed in a direction.

“You piece of shit!” she screamed into the distance before going into a ramble of insults and profanities.

It appeared she had spotted Dad at the edge of the field.

I heard Dad shout back faintly. The scream fest began and with every roar from Dad, a sneeze would follow. Soon, his voice started to sound clearer and there was a looming shuffle of steps.

Dad was in the field.

That realization washed over me and left behind a cold trail of fear. I looked up at Mom, trying to think of a way to stop her shouting when a pretty, yellow butterfly flew in front of me. It landed on my knee and I fixated on it, blocking out whatever my parents were screaming at each other. They fought so often that it was probably nothing different from the usual.

I tried to grab the butterfly, but it flew away. I leaped off the ground and followed it, right as Dad finally reached Mom. I heard his grunts and her shrieks, but none of that mattered to me as much as that butterfly did in that moment.

The butterfly was fast, but I was determined to catch it. I ran as fast as my short, chubby legs would allow me. The lavender got caught on my hair and they brushed against my arms, tickling me. Even though the butterfly was small, its yellow wings stood out against all the purple. It was as if the butterfly was my flashlight through the lavender field, guiding me somewhere. Except I really didn't care where it was taking me. The butterfly was the closest creature to a fairy that I had ever seen.

I had to have it.

It was about to fly higher out of my reach, so I leaped forward into the air. I will never forget that moment.

I felt like a fairy—weightless, free, magical, powerful.

I somehow grabbed the butterfly, but I instantly realized that it was a terrible idea when I felt the butterfly get squished to death under my plump hands. I didn't even have time to mourn because when I landed on the ground, I tripped over my own feet and my head fell against a rock. Like a walnut, it cracked wide open and blood poured into the ground.

The blood and pain didn't scare me as much as the dead butterfly did. Its golden wings were folded awfully unto each other and its body was flat. It twitched for a few seconds, giving me hope, but then it went still.

I tried to get up, but my head was anchored to the ground, too heavy to carry. Minutes passed and the butterfly didn't move again. I tried to call for help, for my parents, for anyone, but my voice failed me.

When I could no longer stand the sight of the butterfly, I focused on the lavenders –tall, perfect, and purple even in the dusk. I wondered if there were any fairies here and if they would save me. I waited, almost imagining the shapes of their dresses and the flutter of their wings, but nothing happened. The sun disappeared behind the horizon, leaving me in the darkness. There were no fairies and this was no fairyland.

The last thing I saw was purple.

About the Author

Lujain Assaf is a Palestinian fiction writer, currently studying at Northwestern University in Qatar (NU-Q). Her work has previously been nominated for NU-Q's Media and Research Awards 2020 and Northwestern University in Evanston's Creative Arts Festival 2020. Her short stories have been published in multiple magazines. She was also featured on the Not Your Daily Stories podcast. To stay up to date with Lujain's work, you can find her as LujainCreates on both Instagram and Twitter.

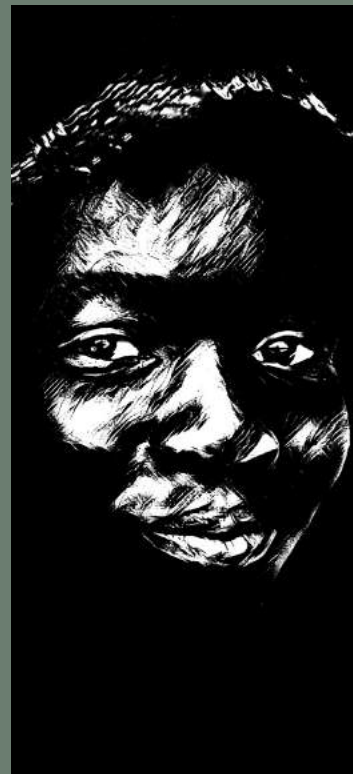
Martins Deep



The song you hear when a guitar is broken
706 x 1599
Digital art / photography



Waiting for Dawn
1060 x 1885
Digital art / photography



Hope-kissed
948 x 2108
Digital art / photography



Durbar in Zaria
1440 x 2436
Digital art / photography

About the Artist

Martins Deep (he/him) is a Nigerian poet, artist, & and currently a student of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. His works deeply explores the African experience. His creative works have appeared, or are forthcoming on FIYAH, The Roadrunner Review, Covert Literary Magazine, Barren Magazine, The Hellebore, Chestnut Review, Mineral Lit Mag, Agbowó Magazine, Suburban Review, IceFloe Press, FERAL, Libretto Magazine, The Shallow Tales Review, Kalahari Review, & elsewhere. He loves jazz, adores Bethel Music and fantasizes reincarnating as an owl. He tweets @martinsdeep1

one lifetime was enough

By: Yun-Fei Wang

that night, sparks flew

the pages breathe in perfume,
as her fingertips soak through
the edges of paper, interlocking
smudged words incited to be read

*sharp stings on my tongue
and a mouth full of blood*

her lips moving softly with words
and coldness seeping from pages
as she pencils within the margins,
yet another life she had forgotten

*barren land, blood-stained skin,
explosions hummed lifeless whispers
i was the ashes born from despair*

in the library all night long,
her fingers flicking pages and
she becomes one with the story,
her breath scattering over words

*as they carried your body away,
i ran my tongue across the edge
of the knife you once gripped,
wanting to savor the last of you*

the rhythm continues as she glows
her warmth into the next chapter.
outside the library, moonlight
illuminates silently from above

*a hundred years later, the first drop of
rain, dissolved in the deserted land*

through glass windows, lights fall
on her jawline, kissing into colors
of last lines in poetry as moonlight
slowly shifts onto her bare clavicle

*blurred visions in a haze, the rain
broke into rivers of torment, cut
through worlds chasing after you*

elixir from a midnight's dream
drapes softly across her neck.
in the distance, the lilac bruises
almost look like lipstick smears

*i'll find a way across our universe
to flow beneath your grave,
and blossom from your tombstone,
roses pale as the moon at midnight*

lips dipped in wine, drowning
in perfume as her fingertips
stain another page painted
of phantoms in dark red ink

*rivers became rivers of galaxies,
i met you at the universe's edge*

slowly parting, her satin lips
breathe of venom sharply sweet,
heartbreaks the color of sunset
traced constellations on her jaw

*until every star had exploded
into smoke clouds, this time fading,
i fell for you in the absence of life*

she sighs as she leans against
wooden bookshelves, fingernails
pulling scratches into the past,
her name darkened between words

*a galaxy spins alone like a curse.
amidst the hollow bitterness, i was
the stardust that turned blue
as i drowned myself in your veins*

in another life, you found me.
on an old dusty bookshelf,
read me through, once in a
lifetime, and that was enough

missing you was more than enough

About the Author

Channeling her regrets into poetry, Yun-Fei Wang, 15, is your average sad high school student from the country of Taiwan. To her, words are colorless sunsets and the first light of dawn. She's not so sure what it means either, but she intends to find that out with the rest of her life. Find her at the coldest midnights, or @immortalrainpoetry on Instagram.

I Die Back Each Year

By: Kay Knofi

The ache which I feel from Summer
Remains in my Stigma my Style my Ovaries

Fiercely torn away
From native dirt
This chapter opens with a drought
My roots stumped
And my color drained

Desperate in my memories
Wading through the thick sweet breath of the East
My ears drowned in the lake of Cicada screams
I bedded among others
They nourished me
And fed me sun
And every day really was a new day

O Rose tinted haze
Droplets of joy ran down my leg
(Living for the sake of living)
My brain now overcast
Storms certain with uncertainty
(When a dream becomes a gray brick of reality)

Perennials die over winter
But next Spring they'll be sitting in the garden
Back again in the sublime universe's soil

About the Author

Kay Knofi is a Scottish poet living in Brighton, UK. She uses stream of consciousness in her poetry as a healing tool. When she's not writing about the darker side of her mind, she's acting as Editor-In-Chief to her mental health awareness zine, I Felt That Zine.

Grief, a Trilogy

By: Emma Smith

I. DREAM

Bare feet in a field of roses.
The flowers whisper to each other,
secrets I will never know.
Among the voices is hers; she speaks my name
in her melodic lilt. Beckons me.
I run and look around, run and look around,
crying out for her, unable to find her.
Her voice taunts me now;
the flowers' whispers grow louder, bolder,
dripping honeyed futures into my mind,
all that we could have had together.
If only we were still together.
If only you could find me. You can't even find me.
Her voice bleeds venom into my lungs and I cannot breathe,
cannot see, cannot find her. Oh, how I need her.
The world becomes a kaleidoscope of pink, white, red,
as she becomes one rose among many,
only thorns in my heart.

II. REALITY

Spikes impaling my heart. Eyes opening. Lungs sucking in cold air.
The dream. Her voice.
For a minute, I heard her there. She was still with me.
Wave after wave, the truth hits me.
That wasn't her. I didn't see her, didn't hear her. She's gone.
Wetness on my cheeks, my pillow. Salt on my lips.
Memories play in my mind, dancing over each other all at once.
Weaving themselves like threads. A knot I cannot untangle.

III. THERAPY

"I don't remember much about the dream, but there were lots of flowers, and then there was her voice. And it hurt that I could hear her but couldn't find her, no matter how much I ran, but... it hurt even more to—to wake up and realize I will never see or hear her again. As much as it hurt to be away from her in the dream, at least she was there somewhere, even—even if not with me. I didn't think I would cry, sorry. I'm sorry, I usually keep my tears to myself, I just—it's... Sorry... It's fine, I'm fine. It's just so—so hard.

She meant everything to me, and now I feel terribly alone. Inescapably vulnerable. I have no idea what I'm meant to do without her. I see her everywhere I go, even in places I'd never think of her before, isn't that weird? Like at the grocery store, when I saw her favorite cheese. I mean, it's just cheese, but somehow it brought down all the memories I'm trying not to think about, and somehow they all crashed into each other until I couldn't tell them apart, couldn't think of anything else. I didn't even realize I was blocking the whole aisle. And at home, I always see the spaces she used to fill—sitting on the couch, washing dishes, making coffee—all empty. It's like living with a ghost. And it hurts me every time, every time an image or a memory of her hits me. I don't want to forget her, ever—I couldn't if I wanted to—but it's so tiring to remember her. I don't think I'm strong enough to remember her. And I guess maybe that makes me a bad person, because I should be keeping her memory alive after her death, but I'm just so tired of being constantly haunted by her ghost. I'm so, so tired."

About the Author

Emma Smith is a high school reader and writer who is especially passionate about poetry. From a young age, she has been enamored with the way language can describe abstract emotions. She views her poems as a way to paint a picture of large, meaningful ideas using the little things in life. After all, the small details together create the big picture.

i drape myself out over the powerlines to dry and hope that you can see me swaying

By: Amanda Pendley

the way to keep a lifeless body upright
is not to prop her against the gurgling belly of a wall
but to curl her over herself and let her limbs dangle

lay her over the arch of the couch
raise the swing to set two feet off the ground
and let her float in halves

throw her over your shoulder as you carry her higher
and she will memorize the bruises of her kneecaps,
the way the spine cradles the subject

how gravity told her to cut her hair
to avoid being stepped on, how she is hefted
with the same grudge as a spare tire

when she mourns her losses she mourns in doubles
what happens and what happens when she remembers
it is easier to saw herself in two than have to live it twice

fold her hamburger style twice then hotdog once
bring her shoulder blades together until her ribs
are forced to not break even

tuck chin to collarbone, knees to chest
heels to upper thighs
and toss her in the dryer

mid-cycle, remember
that you're supposed to hang dry your delicates
take her to the backyard

let her be an unfurled banner that has not been inscribed dead
and leave her until she drip dries into the dirt
until flowers bloom under her feet

About the Author

Amanda Pendley is a queer twenty-one-year-old writer from Kansas City who is currently studying Creative Writing and Publishing at the University of Iowa. Her recent and forthcoming publications include Homology Lit, Vagabond City Lit, Savant Garde Literary Magazine, and The Shore. She often finds inspiration in Lorde songs, movement, and Harry Styles' suit collection.

Eden Falling on Via Veneto

By: Brenna Collins O'Donnell

You're at a newsstand in Rome, laughing beside the rain-ruined copies of *Il Giornale*. Your best friend is teaching you the right way to blow bubblegum. Beneath the same green awning, a man shows his girlfriend how to properly smoke cigarettes. These are lessons in exhaling. We practice what it feels like to let go. It's better to start here, start small.

The world has revolved around this street corner for years. Through empires and world wars and quiet nights where you could hear the oxygen in the air grow older and turn into carbon dioxide. What once kept us alive now poisons us. No one notices, and this is the source of all scenes that look something like bliss.

There are Americans on the corner who believe in God, and then there are those who would rather pray on hands and knees to any man on a soapbox confessional who says he is one. This is a study in the misguided. These are sins of idolatry committed in daylight. This is the death rattle of the party, the song skipping on a broken record as the lights come on. These are the nights we try to decide if ignorance is truly bliss. So let's sit still in this Italian intersection and argue about this: The only reason we know how beautiful Eden was is because we felt it fall.

About the Author

Brenna Collins O'Donnell is a journalist and nonprofit-worker based out of Alexandria, Virginia, writing to make sense of an increasingly tumultuous (still, somehow beautiful) world. She recently graduated from Ithaca College where she was Editor in Chief of the Department of Writing's literary magazine, Stillwater. You can follow her creative writing pursuits on Instagram: @brennacollinsodonnell.

About the Artist
Julia is a high school
sophomore who
enjoys photography
and writing.



SoHo
1527 x 2045 pixels
photography



Art NYC
1938 x 2000 pixels
photography

Julia Seebach

Wash Me in Fire: a requiem for 2020

By: Kaitlan Bui

Today is just another day
Of staring out my window
Into a world of unkept backyard and
Raggedy black cats.

It's just my luck, I guess,
To be vitamin-D deficient,
To be lacking in most of the things that
Used to make a human whole.

Give me something good, will you,
Something magical and orange
Soda crush-y with mint julep on the side,
Like fallen star

s

,

Or teenage love and snapped guitar strings,
A seven-boy band purloining Earth
And all its sun-kissed music—
Will you La La Love me,
Or love me will you not?

But it's just another
Beautiful day in the neighborhood
In the house on the street where someone died
Last year, or maybe
This year too,

The only new thing
Being the hazy reddish sun,
A demi-god promise for a better life—
Forget the Bud Light and the bistro and
Leave the cleaning up to me.

Wash me in fire.
Wash me burn into a horizon.
Wash me bleed into the ashtray

Of a sky-baked afternoon
And gaze at my starlit body from the windfall.

Breathe me in
to the air.

Breathe me good,
Breathe me brave,
And try not to choke.

About the Author

Kaitlan Bui is an Oxford comma enthusiast and recent matcha latte convert. She studies English and East Asian Studies at Brown University, where she often finds herself in the company of good stories and even better people. Kaitlan is currently working on a book based on the life of her great aunt, who was born in Vietnam in the 1930s. You can keep up with her on Instagram @by_kaitlan.

Kalopsia Literary Journal

About the Issue:

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Elwing Gao
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Staff Artist Biographies:

Elwing Gao:

Elwing Gao is a 17-year-old artist from the Silicon Valley Bay Area. Her favorite medium is watercolor, which she is desperately trying (and failing) to stay away from at the moment in order to develop her own flexibility. In her free time, she likes to go outside, press flowers, and play guitar. You can find more of her art [@waves.and.washes](#) on Instagram.

Luana Góes:

Luana Góes is an artist and designer from north Brazil. Her work often uses more than one medium in one piece, from acrylics to watercolors and collages. The art she produces is very influenced by her culture and community, various topics like mental health and movements like impressionism. You can find her on Instagram at [@luana.g.m.](#)