



Scream

magazine

...everything's just fine.



ISSUE 6

"Everything's Just Fine"

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a Note from the Editors

Time, of course, is relative.

January 2021 is commonly being called “a month of Wednesdays,” and most of us seem to feel that this month in particular has lasted far more than 31 days.

Yet time can also pass far too quickly. The aging man laments the rapid speed at which his youth became his dotage. Laughter-filled summer evenings with friends are seemingly over before they’ve truly started.

And time stops. The pain and angst of trauma freezes us. Young lovers find the sweet serenity of a first kiss halts time and space, leaving only them in the moment.

Ultimately, everything is fine.

We cope with time's mysterious passage. We become resilient. Broken. Stronger. Educated.

In this issue of 3 Moon Magazine, you'll find stories, poems, artwork, and hybrid works that share the vulnerability, triumph, and authenticity of the human condition, and how beautifully nebulous the state of being we call "fine" can manifest.

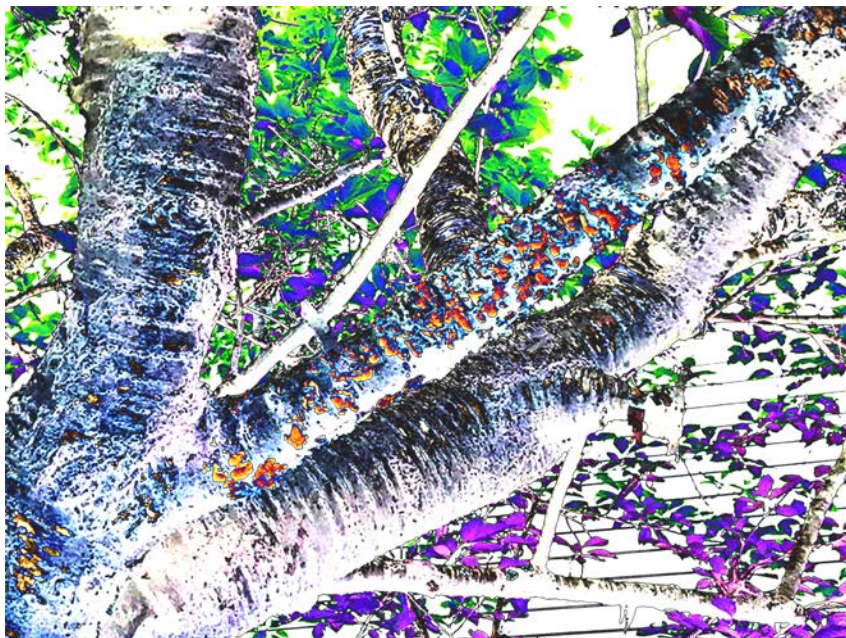
You'll also notice a significant new design in this issue, not only to our logo, but even in the beautiful details of typography and format. Sarah Allen Reed, an exceptionally talented artist, has joined our editorial team as our new Art Director. Months ago as an editorial board, we were nervous about the design of this issue.

Time passed, and indeed, everything is fine.

Thanks for joining us on this journey.

The Breakfast Club

Hannah, Frankie, Efren, Meagan, Sarah, and Kit



The Fungi Jacy Zhang

Jacy Zhang studies English at the University of Maryland.
Her photography was recently published in Riggwelter,
The Lumiere Review, the winnow magazine, and elsewhere.
You can find her on Twitter @JacylZhang.

Prose

*One Night
in the Mist and Snow*
by Voima Oy

Wind and snow falling—the timelines opening. Two girls, Nina and Louise, are heading home on a Thursday night after visiting the art museum.

Snow falling so fast, they can't see where they're going. Overhead, the elevated train squeals and sparks around a curve.

Let's take the subway, says Nina.

The underground station is crowded. The trains are delayed. There's a guy with a guitar on the platform playing let it snow, let it snow. He's cute, says Louise. They start talking. His name is Ravi. Nina sees them 10 years from now, a party by the lake and a cake celebrating a wedding anniversary. She sees October leaves and coffee cups on a kitchen table. Louise looks like her mother, now. Nina hugs her. I can't believe he's gone, she says.

Let's take the el, says Louise.

The platform is crowded. The trains are delayed. The lights of the train emerge from the snow. The train doors open and people get off. Nina and Louise are jammed against the doors. The train careens around a curve, and they are thrown against the back of a guy's backpack. He turns around, smiles at them.

Hi, I'm Ravi, he says, as the train lurches again, and they find themselves dangling in midair.

Voima Oy lives on the western rim of Chicago, near the expressway and the Blue Line trains. Her writing can be found online at Paragraph Planet, The Cabinet of Heed, Burning House Press, and 101 Fiction. Follow her on Twitter, too—@voimaoy and #vss365.

The Green of the Trees

by Carl Taylor

In the familiar front yard, the child rests beneath the tree, her pill bug body curling and uncurling in the scrambled rays of sunlight. Sophia senses the freedom of the moment, even as she remains aware of her mother's watchful brown eyes; x-ray eyes that penetrate the clouded bay windows of their living room. Unearthed dandelions appear to dissolve in her hands, their seeds as smooth as her sandy hair. Somewhere, a dog is barking, a large one from the sound of it. The girl believes she is waiting for her father to return from work, this is their ritual. The endless summer is over and kindergarten looms. Soon it will be Halloween, then Christmas, then a new year. The child understands this now, that there is a fixed circuitry to the years, a set pattern to life.

A cold wind blows, as though from the season ahead. Sophia places her arms inside her shirt. The green tree creaks and sheds cherry blossoms; a mizzle of starfish blanched of color. Plump squirrels play hide-and-seek among decaying leaves, yellow fading into brown. Classical music and church bells sound from somewhere in the middle distance, upbeat concertos by Mozart and Brahms. Sophia spins around and waves to the blurred figure of her mother, five dainty fingers sweeping lightly through the fragrant air.

Sophia hums along to the chamber music, which seems piped in from the very clouds above her. A beautiful day, the temperature comfortable. It seems that it's always like this. The girl can't remember the last time it rained. The sun's stray-dog rays of light feel pleasant in the shade of the cherry blossom; they provide her skin with a warmth that feels nurturing.

A sudden wind gust startles the girl, loosens the pins in her hair. The concerto vanishes, and the church bells ring loud and discordant. Much too loud and from every direction. The hibiscus flowers shrivel and brown before her eyes as in a time-lapse documentary. Sophia has the vague sense that something is wrong but chalks it up to inexperience. After all, much of the world remains mysterious to the child. Then a silence, a blank canvas as though the universe itself has been paused. The church bells no longer sound, the concerto is but a memory, there is no Mozart or Brahms. Silence, *totalis silentio*, save a soft scratching sound from the base of the cherry tree. Sophia crawls to the tree, toward the rustling sound, her knees and knuckles dragging through the beetle-black soil. The girl's heart races, some primal fear, and yet her outward expression remains quizzical. Pine cones snap under her; down here the ground smells a sweet petrichor of pomegranate seeds and lavender and her parents' bitter coffee grounds. Down here the ground is soft and damp and mysterious.

Once settled at the base of the tree, Sophia turns to see if her mother is still watching. Gone... A rattling sound permeates the ground, a *susurrus* that seems to echo from the very roots of the cherry tree. Around the trunk a deep trough forms, an endless well that both terrifies and enchants the child. Sophia

stares down, down into the black licorice abyss of the underworld, as though she is Persephone lured by a darkened chariot. Down there is decay, down there is the bleak loss of hope, the absence of light.

In that moment, she knows. Our Sophia knows that every living creature must someday cease to exist. She knows, even if she doesn't fully comprehend. She tumbles, the child tumbles head-first into the inky tunnel, and when she attempts a scream, she finds no oxygen in her lungs with which to cry.

Further into the pit, and now Sophia senses all the things the adults have kept from her, the many truths too harsh for them to admit, the shame they conceal at 'gifting' her life. She knows then that we are all thin lines of graphite and the world an eraser.

Then a jerk—a firm hand pulls Sophia back, out of the darkness and back toward the light. The hologram world of the virtual reality machine dims and then disappears and she is restored. Sophia is born again, but her eyes will never again be those of a young child. She blinks and she is somehow back inside her house, inside the colonial with the foggy windows and the smell of cleaning chemicals and the cordless black technologies of the times. Her mother is there, kissing her on the forehead, asking if she's okay, massaging her scalp with her slender fingers.

"Sophia! Sophia I'm so sorry that happened to you, are you all right, honey?"

“But mother, I was swallowed by the tree...”

“No, honey. No. You see, it’s just a hologram. It’s all make-believe. There must have been a problem with the program. Perhaps somebody hacked it.”

Sophia doesn’t understand. She doesn’t realize that she is not outside, that she has never been outside.

“The outside is just a videogame honey, it’s not real. The outside has never been real. It just appears that you’re outside when I connect you to the machine.”

Sophia bounces on her mother’s knee, straining to understand these new concepts, concepts as scary as death itself, for the only thing more terrifying than death is the complete absence of light.

“Listen, it’s not safe outside, honey. The air is no longer safe to breathe. We just wanted you to know what it was like when the world was a safer place.”

That evening Sophia ignores her dolls in a colorless playroom. She can’t help but wonder if this too is a façade, a fake, another trick. But the arguing of her parents from the kitchen seems real enough, and when she pinches her wrist the pain stings like truth. Sophia promises herself that she will never again be tricked.

And yet, that night, as she closes her eyes, she can’t help but wonder if she’s entering or leaving a dream.

Carl Taylor's short fiction is forthcoming or has been published in literary journals including Space and Time Magazine, Overheard, LittleDeathLit, the Kelsey Review, Bewildering Stories, and the Cabinet of Heed. Carl Taylor's fiction can be found at www.carltaylorwrites.com.

When Time Skipped Over

by Astra Lee

“If you can take a penis, you most certainly can take this,” the nurse said, rolling her eyes away from the grainy black and white display.

I glanced up at her uncomfortably. I was on my back, spread like an offering. The wand was cold between my legs, seeding icy crystals of humiliation that only seemed to grow after its confirmation and retreat.

“12 weeks,” sighed the doctor, sharing the condescending gaze of the nurse. “The procedure will be swift. Spread your legs and we will begin”

The pressure gripped me. The cold alienation spreading and numbing me. My spirit settled in a disorganized space. I willed myself to leave this body.

Jacqueline rubbed her knee inside my thigh. She knew I was almost there. The heat. The heat was suffocating. The overwhelming smell of Haitian summer was intoxicating. Her touch and the warmth of her breath against my neck were intoxicating.

Tendrils of warmth grew from between my legs, caressing and exciting every nerve in my being. Jacqueline gasped

and collapsed on top of me. I held onto her and the heaviness that weighted me down into blissful stillness.

“Ouch, this hurts,” I managed to formulate in English. “It really hurts!”

“It will be over soon,” the doctor said in a dismissive tone, her gaze and methodical movements unfazed by my objections of pain.

“Now I don’t want to see you back here again, mmkay?” Her hands and instruments tugged between my legs. I was drowning in my humiliation, and her glib, paternalistic tone kept repeating in my head like a cassette tape.

What sound does crushing humiliation make? If no one around chooses to bear witness, is it really happening?

The tugging continued.

She tugged at my jeans trying to undo them. Though my legs softened, I wasn’t ready. I wasn’t there yet. I don’t let myself say it, even if I’m certain that my hesitation was all over my face.

“Don’t be afraid.” Her breath tickled like a feather on my neck.

“Non, je n’ai pas peur.” I wasn’t scared. I just wasn’t ready. Her fingers loosened around the buttons, and before she

pulled away—with all the gentleness that the world always forgets to set aside for girls like me—Jacqueline kissed me.

Life sprung out of my mouth.

Jacqueline opened her mouth to speak and then stopped, her face suddenly contorting from the blissful. Slapping her hand to her ankle revealed a red fire ant curling up in its final moment. Before I could recall another reality existing, a world outside beyond our two bodies, a sting of pain pierced through my body.

The pain was too great to remain stoic. I cried and squirmed and tried to lift myself up from the narrow hospital table.

“We’re almost finished here!” chided the doctor, pressing my thighs back to the table, restoring order to her workspace.

I didn’t know I would be awake through this.

I thought I’d be granted the grace of sleep, a blank purgatory to wait out the procedure, and I would be awoken once my womb was cleansed of my past sins. The sin of walking society’s neatly paved and well lit path that a woman should be with a man.

“Now hush, we’ll give you something for the pain,” said the doctor and went back to laboring.

“It is certainly less painful than raising a baby at 16,” the nurse added, smugly.

No, not here. I willed myself out of my body.

I took Jacqueline’s hand and climbed to my feet. Palming the sweat out of my eyes, we dusted ourselves off and took assessment of the tiny red welts inflicted on our bodies and our catholic sensibilities. We stepped out of the afternoon sun, eyes darting across the yard. The magic veil had been lifted.

The afternoon smell of urine against the heated pavement invaded our nostrils. The annoying toll of the bell of Sacré-Coeur reverberated through the yard reminding us that we skipped mass. We parted ways and went in opposite directions, both hoping that in a month would be soon enough to fake being sick and be excused from mass again.

Thump! The sound of a car door closing brought me back. An uncharacteristic silence hung in the car. I sat next to my Haitian mother, praying she will ignore this moment like all the other stains on our family tapestry. My mother doesn’t do small talks, but now there wasn’t even the usual tongue-lashing that I would get for misbehaving. Like most Haitian mothers, this will be a secret, a blip, a moment in time that will come to pass. It will never be mentioned. It will be as though time skipped over this and never recorded it in the history books.

Astra Lee is a storyteller with a love of combining speculative and science fiction with elements of Haitian Vodou. Having navigated the worlds of a restavek childhood in Haiti, academia, motherhood and everything in between, Astra brings unique, surprising perspectives to her stories and opinions.

Yesterdays

by Michael Chin

Everything moved fast at the party. Lucy, the nice girl from Intro to Psych had invited Ingrid, and going out on a Saturday night got Ingrid's parents off her back about building a social life.

Ingrid had a beer in her hand she'd never asked for, foamy and stinking off the tap. Then there was a girl with purple hair convincing a boy with a crew cut to make out with another boy on the condition that she'd let them watch her make out with a girl. Then the sweetener: a girl would make out with Crew Cut, too.

Which girl?

Ingrid.

Ingrid never agreed, only asked her to repeat what she'd said but she didn't seem to hear Ingrid and then the boys were kissing and people were laughing and people were cheering and then Crew Cut came for Ingrid.

Purple Hair took her shoulders. "This was the deal."

Crew Cut put his hands to either side of Ingrid's head, pulled her in and pushed his tongue between her teeth, onto her tongue, his mouth oddly cold and wet like when Bill Murray

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submerged his leg in a puddle of sludge over and over in Groundhog Day and Stephen Tobolowsky reminded him the first step was a doozy and Murray hate-hate-hated everything.

What a day to live over.

When the same day started over for Ingrid, the first thing she felt sure of was she wouldn't go to that awful party.

The second time the same day recurred, Ingrid got to work on learning Cantonese and programming in C++—skills she'd always wanted, but who had the time?

The party should have been easy to avoid. A text that she couldn't go, and leave it. But Lucy texted back that she wouldn't go to the party either if Ingrid wouldn't go, and she really wanted to go, and if Ingrid didn't go they weren't going to be friends anymore. Ingrid didn't like the pressure, but also understood her personal Groundhog Day might run out at any time and she didn't want to lose a friend. So Ingrid went to the party and stuck close to Lucy, except when she went to the bathroom, Ingrid found herself pushed and pulled in the mass of bodies until she was next to Purple Hair again and kissed by Crew Cut and no less disgusted with everything.

Ingrid learned jiu jitsu, subbing in lessons at the dojo downtown in favor of the time in front of a computer screen. Her self-taught attempts at C++ weren't sticking anyway.

When Ingrid trusted her limbs, when Purple Hair grabbed her, she bent her wrist back in a key lock, and when Crew Cut

came for her, she clamped him into a guillotine choke until he dropped and threw up, and people asked who Ingrid was and she felt very pleased with herself.

She repeated that night a few times, sometimes switching up grappling holds and choking technique, a gogoplata here, a triangle there.

But the day went on. Ingrid kept practicing her jiu jitsu and Cantonese and took up baking muffins. She read War and Peace. The hardest part was remembering which page she'd left off on, but she settled on fifty pages a day, with the incidental benefit of helping her keep track of how many days had gone by.

But for as much she tried, practiced, perfected, and got done, Ingrid nonetheless felt the existential dread seeping in. What if the day never did end? What if this were hell, or she'd fallen out of sync with the rest of the world?

Ingrid settled on a theory. That the only way out of this day was through it, and whatever time loop she'd fallen into wasn't designed for her to make the world a better place or achieve any epiphanies, but rather her best shot at escape was to realign timelines by getting the day back on its original course so that time itself might get back on track.

She went to the party. She sipped bad beer and let Crew Cut kiss her. That part, at least, felt less invasive for the intimacies she'd accumulated, like knowing to step her right foot back so he wouldn't step on it while distracted with her tongue, and like knowing exactly how much pressure exerted for how long

on his throat would render him unconscious, and like that his name was Sean.

It worked.

Ingrid woke, free of the cycle on a day when her alarm went off because she was due at work and the sky was brighter in a sunny morning instead of an overcast one. But her sense of relief was quickly overturned by the weight of returning to life in a world that carried on, oblivious that, by Ingrid's best estimates, she hadn't been to work or school in at least two years.

She unlocked the glass doors at the Reel to Reel video store, seven minutes late but still ahead of Big Todd, the manager. Big Todd wore sunglasses when he arrived, a button-up shirt misaligned with a gaping opening in the middle so his chest hairs puffed out. He carried a sixty-four ounce Styrofoam cup of coffee and on entering announced, "You won't believe the day I had." He'd tell her about his yesterday, because he'd only had one yesterday.

Of course, he hadn't been stuck on a loop. He told her about his actual day, standing uncomfortably close as per usual, from a distance she couldn't help but smell his buttery-sausage stench.

She made a mental escape to the day before. What if she'd maxed out her credit card on a plane ticket to Paris? She'd always wanted to see Paris. Who cares if she'd gotten there late into the night? She thought she might've lied down at the base of the Eiffel Tower and fallen asleep looking up to where

wrought-iron lattice split the space between stars, only to have woken in her own bed.

Michael Chin was born and raised in Utica, New York, and currently lives in Las Vegas with his wife and son.

He is the author of three full-length short story collections: *You Might Forget the Sky was Ever Blue* from Duck Lake Books, *Circus Folk* from Hoot 'n' Waddle, and most recently *The Long Way Home* from Cowboy Jamboree Press. Chin won the 2017-2018 Jean Leiby Chapbook Award from *The Florida Review* and *Bayou Magazine's* 2014 James Knudsen Prize for Fiction. Find him online at miketchin.com and follow him on Twitter @miketchin.

Project Daphne

by Jonathan Robbins Leon

The glazed metal was cold under her hand. Technicians buzzed around her, but none of them stared. They understood that the capsule was Kayana's brainchild, more flesh and blood to her than the two children she'd had and given up for adoption. Decades of life had been absorbed into her research, and then decades more into perfecting the design.

The urgency of the mission had required her to forgo family. There'd been small snatches of love, of course. Unavoidable entanglements with fellow scientists. These affairs had never brought more than a week of happiness, followed by months of awkward encounters if Kayana could not have the men transferred to another team.

One of the techs slid out from underneath the capsule. Flat on a creeper, he was startled by her presence. "Sorry, Dr. Moore," he said before disappearing back under the hull.

Project Daphne had sprung from Kayana's personal letter to the Administrator. The habitable properties of Daphne in the Eos galaxy had just been announced. Entire departments had been assigned the task of figuring out how to harness Professor Dombroski's work into a predictable output. His successful trial of human quantum tunneling had resulted in his death after his shuttle reappeared near the satellites orbiting Europa. With no way to bring him home, the Professor had died, but not before

transmitting confirmation that he had indeed travelled nearly 400 million miles in 7 minutes.

The question remained how to aim a shuttle for quantum travel. At the time Kayana was a research assistant, but she sketched out a very simplified design for a capsule that could withstand quantum tunneling through light-years of distance, and in the corner she'd written a proof that would allow for specific departure and destination points. When none of her superiors had taken her proposal seriously, she dropped it into the lap of the Administrator while he was at lunch. "It's all very simple," she said. She'd written her dormitory number at the top of the page, and she was not surprised when he knocked on her door that very evening.

There'd been three other Administrators since then. The first had died of old age, and the next two had retired before Kayana's capsule had been built. The finished project was very like her original design. To be able to touch it now was both a thrill and anticlimactic, for she'd known exactly how it would need to look decades ago.

Back then, she'd been sure it would be her taking the capsule on its maiden voyage. Perhaps, like Dombroski, she would die. This mattered very little though. Project Daphne had taken so much from her. Why not the rest?

This last September, though, she'd been in the commissary having coffee when the cup had slipped from her hand. Her arm collapsed against the chair. She tried to stand, but the room was

suddenly a drunken swirl of shapes without borders, and she went down.

A minor stroke. Kayana had been back to work within three weeks, but the whispers had started then. When she would arrive to brief the Administrator on the status of the project, he would sometimes have one of her assistants already in the room, and their conversation would cease suddenly at her arrival.

Then Ciara was assigned to her. She'd been a Research Lead on another project, but she happily accepted the opportunity to be Kayana's Chief Assistant, a position created for her. Kayana was to give full access to Ciara, a privilege granted only to the Administrator.

It was obvious to Kayana that Ciara had been chosen to pilot the capsule. She understood. Not much was known about the physical toll of quantum tunneling such a far distance. If travel to Daphne were to induce another stroke, Kayana would not be able to communicate her arrival. Decades of work and trillions of dollars would be wasted, and humanity would be no closer to abandoning its fast-dying origin planet.

It would be Ciara, but no one said this in Kayana's presence. Undoubtedly, they worried she would be unwilling to continue work on the project. Though she'd never thrown any tantrums or proven herself to be difficult to work with in any way, she was still regarded as emotional. She was, after all, female.

At the briefing this morning, the Administrator had asked to see Kayana for dinner. Project Daphne was completed. All that was left was the trial, which was scheduled for the following month. Kayana had endured the physical exams and tests required of any astronaut, but she'd made peace with the fact that all of this was a charade to keep her working. Tonight, the Administrator would tell her the truth. Kayana wasn't sure how she would respond. She hoped that, as she had practiced, she'd nod and say she understood, retaining her dignity. Still, she worried tears would come. So many years she'd worked, hoping to be the first human to see the stars of another galaxy, but she had only been preparing the way for another.

"Dr. Moore," Ciara said. Kayana turned to face her, her hand still flat against the pregnant belly of the capsule. "You have your dinner, don't you? With the Administrator? I can take over here."

Yes. She could take over. Ciara's mind was brilliant, and most importantly, it was housed in a strong, young body that could endure light-years of distance. Like Kayana, the thought of dying in the Eos galaxy did not seem to trouble her. Surely Ciara had known all along that it was her who would be on-board. She'd absorbed as much as she could from Kayana, and now she would make the final sacrifice to the project. She would see Daphne.

"Are you alright, Dr. Moore?"

"Put your hand here," Kayana said.

The Chief Assistant raised her eyes in bemusement, but she placed her hand next to Kayana's, flat against the hull.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" Kayana asked.

In Ciara's eyes swam galaxies of love for Kayana's baby. At some point, the techs had all disappeared for dinner. It was just the two of them in the bay, standing shoulder to shoulder. A long minute of silence passed as both women looked over the smooth contours of the shuttle. In a reverent voice, Ciara said, "So beautiful."

Jonathan Robbins Leon is a queer author of contemporary and speculative fiction. His short fiction has been published by Flame Tree Press, *A Story Most Queer*, and *Tales to Terrify*. He regards himself as an old movie buff, Shirley Jackson enthusiast, and decent Bette Davis impersonator. Together with his husband and son, he lives in a dusty, historic house blocks away from the library he haunts in Kissimmee, Florida.

Biology 1020.

Diversity of Life

by Elisabeth Bellamy

“Mwerp?”

Leanne shook her head, sat bolt upright, and focused hard on the man lecturing from the front. Did Dr. Baesley just say ‘mwerp?’ Her Intro to Bio professor droned on as though nothing had happened. The other students continued their notes and doodles as though nothing had happened. Other than herself, the only person who seemed to notice that something had happened was her lab-partner, Mark. He was side-eyeing her curiously.

She sat back, slouching down again into the warm spot on her seat. Wary eyes watched as Dr. Baesley reached for the remote control. The tiny lecture hall darkened; the screen flickered to life. A reflection from the projection tinted the older man’s face a sickly blue. It suited him. Dr. Baesley leaned in toward his laptop, navigating files, the gills on the side of his neck expanding with a huff. Excitement?

Wait. Leanne blinked. Gills? There were no gills. She could see his neck clearly; he was craning it to watch the large screen overhead. Leanne rubbed her eyes. The room filled with the muffled burbling of underwater while scenes from the professor’s deep-water expeditions played. Flashes of silver painted light across eager faces as schools of fish swam by. Dr. Baesley

leaned against the podium, his eyes riveted to the seabed above and his lab coat swaying in the current.

Leanne's eyes darted to the clock. Ten minutes. She needed coffee. Mark leaned in, asking something softly as he twirled a pen with webbed fingers. Leanne stared. The translucent green flesh between each proximal phalange of his left hand was mesmerising. It was tempting to take notes.

"Leanne! Are you all right?" Mark's hiss broke Leanne's trance. She saw concern in his face.

"Mwerp?" Dr. Baesley's voice was soft. Leanne looked forward, furrowing her brow. He was speaking to himself. Absentminded. His gaze was anchored to the screen. A smile played at his lips. His gills pulsed with every breath.

Leanne's breathing became laboured. The air in the room had grown heavy. The clock read seven remaining minutes. The pages of her text were starting to curl in the moisture of the room. Uneasy, she turned back to her lab-partner. Mark's gills fluttered gently, reflecting the care in his posture. Leanne shut her eyes tight. Just breathe.

She felt the lights turn back on. A gentle silence settled in as the projector fan turned off. The smothering moisture dissipated. Leanne cracked open her eyes. Her arms tingled.

Dr. Baesley was tucking a folder of papers under his arm. His gills were gone; his face was normal.

“How about we end class a few minutes early, hey?” He grinned. There was a rumble of shoved chairs and closing laptops. He raised his voice. “I’ll see you all next week! And don’t forget your lab report is due next Tuesday!”

Leanne didn’t move. Mark was packing up beside her. She glanced up.

“You okay?” He paused before slinging his bag to his shoulder. She glanced at his perfectly human hands.

“Yeah.” Leanne closed the damp pages of her textbook and stood up.

For 20 years, Elisabeth (Beth) Bellamy’s relationship status with writing was “complicated.” An invisible dragon was stalking her and whispering lies. Winning local poetry contests and active involvement in writing groups clashed with Beth’s inability to believe her voice was worth hearing. Eight years as an English teacher and creative writing instructor allowed her to help others find their means of self-expression while she regularly hid her own work from others’ eyes. The dragon became relentless. After taking a 15-year detour away from writing and nearly stifling her soul in the process, Beth eventually decided to face down the dragon that stole her voice. That journey led her to both switch careers into the mental health field and to begin trusting in her own sense of self. Now a champion for spiritual healing and mental wellness through creativity, Beth’s current passion for writing is the satisfying reward for having fought and slain her own dragon. This first piece, “Biology 1020: Diversity of Life,” was originally drafted in 2002. Resurrected from the belly of the dragon, Beth considers this piece to be a gift from her healing soul.

Hack for Saving Images

by Cecilia Kennedy

Someone's insides swim about the Internet, and they're needed for a presentation. My son has tried to pin them to a slide in the traditional way by highlighting, copying, pasting, but the images won't stick. "Mom-it-won't-work-come-help-me" drifts up the stairs, so I go. I go and make the lean, red teres minor ripple and the edges of the scapula of the posterior right shoulder stick to a high-school-sports-medicine-elective-class-illustration. Somewhere in the time it takes to find images to cut and copy, I've discovered a better way. I've found a hack, and I'm documenting it to make sure it can be repeated precisely: I just click on the image, and then stretch out onto the kitchen countertop and lie down face first with my head in the sink. With my head in the sink, I can concentrate on any image I want, with my eyes closed, as the sun sets or fades or transitions into mid-morning or afternoon; I don't know which, and I can ask myself, "What are the colors, the edges, and the folds of what I've just seen?" I tried this with a series of images, which mostly consisted of pumpkin-spiced foods and a dog that came tearing through a wedding. I closed my eyes, but I forgot to set the timer, so I called upstairs to my husband, "Honey-set-the-timer-I'm-saving-images-from-the-internet." "Is-this-what-you'll-do-all-day?" he asked, but I didn't answer because the food images were getting vivid; a pumpkin-spiced hot dog floated through a canine wedding, and I felt a surge of inner peace, which only lasted as long as "Mom-can-I-wash-my-hands?" and "No, go look at your scapula." I'm not sure when

the front door closed, and silence among the images lasted, but they were soon interrupted by hazy remnants of dreams I'd had of my son away at college. He was happy in his dorm room, but maybe he was also sad, and I'd said, "Do you remember the time I helped you capture that image for your class?" and he'd said, "No, but I do remember that time you crawled onto the countertop and stuck your head in the sink, so Dad and I climbed Mount Pilchuck, and the mountains in the distance reminded me of the back of your sloping neck, your hair spilling out into the clouds, and I can't get that picture out of my mind."

Cecilia Kennedy taught English and Spanish courses in Ohio for over 20 years. Currently, she lives in the Greater Seattle area with her family. Since 2017, she has been writing and publishing short stories in literary journals, magazines, and anthologies online and in print. The *Places We Haunt* (Potter's Grove Publishing) is her first short story collection, which was released June 30th. She also keeps a blog of her humorous attempts at cooking and home repairs. Fixin' Leaks and Leeks: <https://fixinleaksnleeksdiy.blog/>

No Detail Too Small

by DB Lynn

You were the last person to see my family alive.

Well.

I think you were. For years I was positive that you had seen us as we went by. It's only the last few years that the doubts have crept in. Maybe it's age. A few times lately I've forgotten the words for things. Simple things. Once it was 'can opener.' Can you imagine? Its name is its bloody purpose, for God's sake. Can opener. That worried me a bit, I admit. I made an appointment with my GP to discuss it, then forgot why I was there! Asked about my eczema instead and then remembered once I was back in the parking lot with a prescription for cream. Around the same time, I read an article highlighting the unreliable nature of our own memories. According to this article—and of course I can't remember where I read it—our memories are constantly being overwritten. Every time you remember an event, you are simply recalling the last time you did so! Now that made me question everything I remember, since, as you probably know, there is no one I can ask.

We were on our way back from camping, the six of us. What you probably noticed first was the sound. The singing. It was Kumbaya, though you'd be forgiven for not recognizing it. Harmonizing was not our strong suit. Kevin's voice was changing, and Molly had been stung twice on the arm that morning,

so she was quieter than usual. In hindsight, I think it's quite likely my parents had chosen that song ironically, given the circumstances. Our supplies, which we had barely managed to squeeze in before heading out, were far too many for the trip back. Sleeping bags, the massive army tent my father insisted we needed, clothes, books, board games, tin pots and pans, all of it, piled in, crammed in, wherever it fit. Our old canoe on the roof. Half-eaten bags of marshmallows and dirty clothes and damp towels stuffed under the seats. We'll sort it once we're home, my mother said. We all knew we wouldn't, but it sounded reasonable, so we worked as a team chucking anything we could find into the back of the van. Annie and I made a game of it, which started out friendly enough, but became more and more competitive as it went on, with shoes and Archie comics flying, and ended with my father breaking us up as he always did. We couldn't help it. I admit that Annie's the one I think of most often, wonder what my life would be like now if I was still a twin. Once, when I told my wife this, she tried to reassure me. You're still a twin, she said. I got very angry, I admit. I think I yelled. No, I told her, I am alone, totally alone in a way a non-twin could never understand. She has never mentioned it again, but I see her watching me sometimes and I'm pretty sure that's what she's thinking about.

So. The song. We had just started singing it a second time when we passed you. You were about to hang a red and white checkered blanket on your laundry line. I remember this for certain, because I wondered if it was your family's picnic blanket and made a mental note to suggest we get one just like it when we got home. There was no point in asking my mother right then. The wind was too loud with all the windows open.

And the singing. You turned to look at us just as we went by. You were smiling, or at least I used to think you were, but you may have been squinting. That particular detail worries me now, the squinting, because if you were squinting, you might not have been able to see us at all.

What I remember is this.

My father was driving. He was wearing his camping shirt, the blue one with the orange sleeves and the rip in the back, and the hiking boots he'd had since before the four of us were born. He was singing. His Adam's apple—an alarming, pointy knob I have unfortunately inherited and even more tragically, passed down to my own son—was bobbing up and down with the effort of it. My mother was sitting in the passenger seat, waving her freckled arm in the wind as though she was swimming. She was wearing a bright yellow sundress with daisies on it. Years later at a summer carnival I saw a woman wearing the exact same dress and sicked up in a garbage can. Funny that. At the time I blamed it on the rides. Kevin was sitting next to me, wearing grey swim trunks and a brown t-shirt with 'MATH CHAMPS '82' in white letters across the front. He was singing too, and jiggling his knee like he always did. The girls were in the back. They had started the trip playing a made-up game using Monopoly pieces, but it had ended when Molly ran out of steam. There were streaks on her dusty cheeks from crying after the bee stings. Two on her left arm. She had pigtails and was wearing a shirt with a blue bonneted girl—what was her name again? Hollie Hobby. That's it. 'Start each day in a happy way' it said. She was still holding her Monopoly piece and looking out the window. I remember this for certain, because I'd turned

back to look at her just moments before we passed you with your arms raised, holding your blanket. I gave her a thumbs up, or maybe I didn't. I should have. Annie was half asleep beside her. She had her mouth open and was wearing a bright green bathing suit. Her shoulders were red with sunburn. I was shirtless in my favourite cut off shorts with the baseball iron-on patch, and holding my Simon on my lap. The electronic game, maybe you remember it, the one that lit up in a series of beeps and flashes you had to repeat in sequence. I spent hours playing it until the batteries died, at which point my mother would say for goodness sake, go play outside and get some fresh air.

We all smelled of campfire, as did the van and everything in it.

I admit I don't remember nearly as much about the next part, though that has taken some effort.

What I do remember is the expression on your face as you peered in at me, and that you turned to your husband and told him to hurry home for more towels, which made absolutely no sense. We weren't going to the beach; we were on our way home. I remember you patting my hand over and over and telling me to try to stay still, and not to move, that I was going to be just fine.

That last bit, I held onto for quite awhile.

What I'm hoping you can tell me is that of course you remember seeing us, the family singing its way down the highway just as you were putting your washing on the line. That you re-

member it clearly, because you had just taken your family's picnic blanket out of the laundry basket as our van came into view. That you remember everything about it like it was yesterday; how loud we were singing, and how happy we all looked. I need you to remember Molly's t-shirt, and our old canoe, and the freckles on my mother's arm. I'm asking you to tell me that you recall, with vivid detail, my father's boots, and the way Kevin jiggled his knee, and the Monopoly pieces, and Annie's bathing suit, and the campfire smell. Please tell me you remember all of this. No detail is too small. As you know, there is no one else I can ask.

DB Lynn lives in British Columbia.

Loose Heat

by Brenna Zanghi

We were sitting in his car, and he didn't believe I would let him go nearly as far as we had. He might have even loved me, or gave enough of a shit to pretend, which was a lot for Tony Mather. Somewhere between me peeling my shirt, my second skin, off along with the thin padding of my bra and him tugging his own jersey over his head, he had even reached over the mountains of my spine to twist the temperature dial upward—all the way up. He aimed the vents at me too, the hot air nearly piercing my flesh, sandwiching me between human and manufactured heat. We had gone much farther than he had expected, down to the under-wires, when I began to cry.

“Oh fuck,” he gasped, hands gripping my sides, “shit, did I hurt you?”

Tony Mather was asking if I was okay. I rubbed my eyes, turning away as I gasped, the sobs rushing from my body in a furious slide that bent me sideways and away from his warm embrace, my face rocking into the velvet of the seat. The fabric smelled like sex.

“It's not you, it's just—” My voice was muffled, his hand began rubbing my shoulder gently. The absence of both his and the car's heat was apparent on the December evening, but I'm sure he thought the goosebumps that rose under his large palm were for him.

“I’m so sorry, I’m so embarrassed, oh god, can we go? Can we just go?” I cried.

“Baby, it’s okay, baby—it’s okay, are you a virgin? It’s okay, it’s normal to hurt the first time.”

My tears ran like fire down my cheeks, chewing my flesh like acid as they left snail-trails of loose heat in their wake. “No,” I whispered, “No, I’m not a virgin... I was, oh god.”

I lurched, clawing at the door handle in a desperate attempt to escape the metal shell. Tony noticed and immediately jerked backwards to unlock the car, watching as I was propelled forward onto the grass and heaved a mixture of white phlegm and stomach acid onto the ground. The earth around me hissed in complaint, steam rising around me in a fog.

“When I was a little girl,” I sobbed, “I was a little girl—I’m so sorry.”

“Fuck, fuck.” He was there, standing above me, watching as my hair became coated in fluid and bodily steam. Tony Mather hadn’t expected us to go this far.

“I’m so sorry, Tony, I’m so sorry—this is so embarrassing.” I turned and looked at him, vomit moistening my lips, tears highlighting my collarbones, moonlight sending pale shadows across the curves of my exposed breasts. I leaned forward, hair messed by his hands still. “I’m so sorry,” I cried.

“Oh, baby,” he whispered, then. “Baby, I’m sorry. I’m sorry.” He kissed my forehead, leaning down on his knees, holding me. “I’m sorry, you don’t deserve that. Let me help you.”

“Okay.”

“Okay,” I whispered back, the heat of my voice curling around his face in soft smoke. I crawled up his body, pressing my bare chest against his as my lips dusted over his cheek; “Okay, help me.” I watched his throat contract, felt his hands grip the soft skin of my hips.

“How?” he whispered, voice cracking. “Want me to help you forget?”

“No,” I murmured, rocking my hips forward as my lips ghosted over his, “I want you to remember.”

I did not see the look on his face, because my skin was already sliding off and covering my eyes like folds of silk as it slithered forwards. I did not hear his screams, because I swallowed them within my kiss as my arms gently held him downward. I watched as this skin, my skin, this tragically beautiful burden wrapped him into its soft, hot embrace, squirming gently under his pants as he struggled to break free.

“Do you remember, Tony?” I whispered against his soft, wiggling skin. “Do you remember? I was just a little girl, Tony.”

The moonlight glared off the pale scars on my chest and groin as my second skin peeled away to reveal my true, rough, bitter self. I watched as it wrapped around his eyelids—pulling them open, forcing him to look as his mouth opened in another scream of recognition, of terror, of, hopefully, pain.

“Shit, did I hurt you, baby?” I hissed. “Don’t scream, baby, it’s normal to hurt the first time—that’s what you told me, that’s what you said.”

“Please,” he choked, voice garbled around the skin that lunged down his throat the moment it opened. “Please... stop...”

“I asked, too.” I stood above him, pressed my skin onto his throat just as he had. “I asked, too—I won’t stop, either. Now you’ll understand—you’ll have to wear this skin, every day; you’ll have to wear my pain, the scars you gave me, the acid that boils my stomach, you’ll have to wear that every goddamn day, just like I have.”

I watched as the transformation completed, Tony Mather laying before me in a crumpled, fragile form of a scared, burned bundle of flesh and exposed nerves. I watched as the air burned him, watched as each soft exhale made him flinch.

“You’ll have to live with that pain, now,” I said, pulling his keys from the ground as I stood upwards, one hand on the door of his truck. “That pain is yours, now.”

He moaned, low and soft.

“Don’t complain,” I murmured, leaning down one final time to run the edge of his car key down the ridge of his back, watching him shiver. “You asked for it.”

Brenna Zanghi is a writer from Upstate New York, where she has just returned after receiving a Masters of Science in Digital Sociology from the University of Edinburgh. She has been previously published in NAME Magazine, a University at Buffalo publication.

Folding

by Philip Berry

She stands near the public pond, a tall woman in middle age. The edges of her petrol blue coat hang vertically, unbuttoned, the buttons invisible. It is designed to be featureless, its planes uninterrupted.

She is staring at the surface of the water where two swans guard a cygnet. A dog lead hangs from one of her hands, a plumb line. The dog is short-haired, motionless. His ears rise like narrow pyramids. He watches the cygnet without blinking. His legs are poised to spring, but he would not move unless his owner gave permission.

The energy that circulates between the woman, the dog and the birds is intense, silent, and exclusive. There is activity on the common. Children are running around, recreating games they used to play with friends. Fathers are submitting to their entreaties. Mothers look around, wondering how such togetherness can co-exist with the tragedies being experienced by others.

The woman is a mother too, but her child is at home. Her free hand rises to push away the razor-straight curtain of dark brown hair that a slight breeze has pushed forward across an eye. Her movements are specific, unhurried, and smooth.

Her phone vibrates in a hidden pocket. She slides a fingertip across it to release the voice. It is the hospital. She was not expecting this; they spoke just before she left the house. She knows everything: the trajectory, the plan, the next steps.

The voice asks a question that can mean only one thing. The trajectory has changed. She does not bend her head to the phone. She stands erect, elegant, while words disorientate and shock her. No, I cannot come in right away. I live two hours away.

Then she must accept a call on her phone. A video call. We need to do it now, we need to put her to sleep and attach her to a ventilator. And this may be, might be, the last opportunity... I'm sorry.

Still she holds her shape. It is not conscious. She is not maintaining dignity for anyone's benefit. She walks to the edge of the common. It's just the way she holds herself. The dog follows, never straying, keeping the lead vertical, keeping his tail in line, thoughts of sinking yellow teeth into soft grey feathers, of tearing red flesh and crunching warm, delicate bones banished.

The screen fills with the foreshortened face of her mother. Whoever is holding the screen must have other things to keep an eye on, like drug infusion rates and physiological parameters, for the window wavers. Her mother is too weak to hold it. The lower part of her face is obscured by a mask. The cheeks above are swollen and reddened by the harsh sirocco of

high flow oxygen. Her eyes are moist. She knows the situation. The woman by the pond controls her own features. While the horror of the situation must not be reflected, the love, a complex love that is not a homogenous thing, cannot be adequately communicated. But she finds words, and receives a nod of comprehension. The elder's eyes close slowly and re-open, making a pregnant final phrase.

The call is terminated by an unseen finger, after a kind and professional epilogue.

It is time to return home. But the woman does not follow the shortest path. Her dog hesitates, for he knows the best way back and does not understand the first movement. The woman walks towards an empty bench. The cloud above has thickened and many of the families have left, their exercise hour up.

She stands by the bench. The swans have moved out of sight. The phone is still in her hand, inert. A gentle pressure on toned, well-exercised calves tells her that the bench is at her back. The energy that held her together runs away, through the coat's silk lining and into the wood. She drops the lead, which spools in a rough oval before the dog's noble snout. Then, in sequence, her body folds in two at the waist, her knees collapse, her elbows flex, her hands rush to her face, she falls back onto the bench, tears flow through her fingers and her lungs heave.

At first, the blue coat remains spotless, but when the woman arches her back and throws her face up into the fresh air

through sob swollen lips, a dark line, lichen probably, is pressed into the part just below the shoulders.

Philip Berry is a London-based doctor. His short fiction has appeared in Headstuff, Liars' League, Deracine, Coffin Bell and Mystery Tribune. He also writes poetry and CNF. His work can be explored at www.philberrycreative.wordpress.com or @philaberry on Twitter.

She Cried and She Cried

by Yelaina Anton

She wanted to know if the moon would answer. That was what she told herself before she got drunk, and that was what she told the cops when they questioned her for the second time the next morning.

The company of two bottles of cider seemed appropriate, but she made the same mistake she had made a hundred times: she was a lightweight, and just one good cider was enough to get her seeing stars and talking to the moon. She drank two anyway.

It was fine, because the garden welcomed alcoholism, with its high walls, reaching vines, curious, invasive things like that. It welcomed loneliness, self-hatred, misery, and sometimes a mangy cat. The landlord should have warned her about all this, but he didn't, because he didn't care. Cars in the distance, oblivious of the sad girl in her sad garden, squealing in the night. The domestic fight next door, something about his expensive habits and her excessive lack of trust, making something sound beautiful with the piano playing from somewhere and the ringing of her phone, probably the boss.

"You see what I mean?" she slurred, waving the bottle at the moon. The light fractured across the glass, and through it,

the moon went the color of piss. “He won’t leave me alone. He can’t keep himself away from me.”

The boss was calling to tell her she was fired for drinking on the job and offering marijuana to an underaged coworker.

Her eyes went wide. “Maybe he loves me.”

The boss was happily married and many years older than she was. He began hating her the minute she got the job. He was celebrating right now, as a matter of fact, delighted he could finally run the warehouse without a sad drunk always sneering from the corner.

“Oh, he loves me.” She laughed—it wasn’t a pretty laugh—and held the bottle close to her face, kissing the neck. “Shhh, you can’t tell anyone!” She laid across the grass, crushing weeds and probably a few ants, giggling and whispering sweet nothings to a cider bottle.

There was a woodlouse a few inches from her head, conquering blades of grass like his life depended on it, scuttling away from her much faster than she would have liked.

“Come back,” she murmured. She sounded sad. She was sad. Her only company was two empty bottles, the moon, and a woodlouse—and the woodlouse was leaving. She used the two bottles to corner the little thing, laying them flat in the grass. But she didn’t anticipate the gap left by the necks. The woodlouse slipped away and never looked back.

She began to cry.

At some point, she stood up and got one of the bottles in her hand. Then it was flying through the air and shattering into a thousand stars against the side of the garden shed. The stars disappeared into the grass, and she asked the moon to make a shard land on the woodlouse. Then she was on the ground again. She clutched her knees and heard someone yelling like they were going to die. Suddenly, her throat hurt. She realized she had been the one yelling.

She looked up at the moon and asked it why. Why what? She didn't know.

The moon didn't answer.

The neighbors did. They stopped fighting and called the cops.

"We got a noise complaint," the pretty cop said. This one was tall and dark and handsome, but he reminded her of the woodlouse: he'd probably leave if he got to know her. "Just try to keep it down."

"How much have you been drinking?" asked the other one. He was short and blond and ugly, and he reminded her of the piss-moon.

The pretty cop shot him a look that said, I really don't care. Let's just leave her here and let alcohol poisoning do the job. Maybe she imagined that, but it was something a wood-

louse would say, and after all, this cop was just a tall and dark and handsome woodlouse. Maybe she was just imagining that too. Her third lover had once called her delusional.

They left after she said two ciders and they didn't believe her. The landlord should have warned her about the nosy neighbors.

She cried when they left. She listened to the voicemail her boss left, and then she cried after that too. She cried because she was jobless, drunk, and sad. Really, she cried because she was jobless, drunk, and sad, and an orphan, but she didn't want anyone to know that. That was why she had come into the garden. She cried when the woodlouse left, cried when the cops left, cried every time the moon hid behind the clouds—all because she was so hilariously alone. She cried because she forgot you could become an orphan in your twenties when you live in a small apartment with a sad garden and have no friends besides alcohol and a woodlouse and a mangy cat if you're lucky.

She threw the other bottle and screamed at the moon, but the cops didn't come back until the next morning, when the neighbors woke up from apology-sex and came over to see if she was okay. She didn't answer the door because she was lying on her back on the kitchen tiles counting the stains on the ceiling, so they called the cops.

But that wasn't until the morning. No one cared about the sad girl in her sad garden until the morning. No one told her to lock the doors when she went inside, so she didn't. No one told her to take off her makeup, so she didn't. And no one cared as

long as she wasn't making any noise, so she didn't sleep. She threw her blankets in the washing machine, didn't turn it on, and laid on the kitchen floor, staring at the moon through the window blinds, which she left wide open because no one told her not to. She cried and she cried until the moon gave up and the sun came out and the pretty cop knocked on her door.

Yelaina Anton hails from a small city outside Boston, USA and studies Creative Writing at NUIG in Ireland. Find her work in *Perhappened Magazine*, *Versification*, *Ayaskala*, *Nightingale & Sparrow*, and *Anti-Heroine Chic*, among others.

Old, Dusty Clock

by Scott Anderson

Deep in the dust of the dreary old house, there was an old clock. Under layers of dust, the old clock did not tick, for time had taken that away long ago, and it was filled with dust. Though, if the dusty old clock had ticked then, or any time soon, it would have invoked a dreary feeling, for a long abandoned dusty old clock should not tick. A sudden tick, or even an expected one, would be horrifying within a silent dreary old house, and with no one to hear it, one could question if there even was a tick. And ticks did fill the trees outside, which swayed under afternoon gales, the very which gales that swept through the dreary old house and brought up dust, but only on unusual occasions. The dust went outside and disappeared, never to be seen again. Dreary, isn't it? That dust should appear only to disappear, and no one knows where it goes.

Scott Anderson is a twenty-one year old student pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Literature and Language, and has been passionate about fantasy worlds since he was a ten year-old building kingdoms with Legos.

Besides writing, he enjoys walking his dogs (though he usually has to carry the old one), and playing Dungeons & Dragons. He enjoys writing because it fuels his motivation in every aspect of life, and after just three years of doing it, he can't imagine going a week without writing.

The House That No Longer Exists

by Larna Bobby Lou

In its place now sits not-so-new, new build houses, the kind of new builds whose bricks are of such a light brown they look almost yellow. Each house looks identical to the one before it, the one in front of it and the one in front of that, the same dark brown wood around every window, the same strip, two bricks thick, which runs at the same height on every house and under their windows for ‘decoration.’ The same thin black railings act as dividers between each building’s front-bricked gardens, separating nothing, changing nothing, keeping nobody in or out.

At this exact moment in my time the street is quiet; no cars pass by and no people are heard. Looking down the road at the copycat houses, I can’t help feeling out of place, an impulse pumps artificiality into my brain.

Although I know this, exactly this, this is not where I belong or even where I came from. I know on another level, another level of foundations perhaps, and underneath that, that this is where I must belong, because this is where I came from, this is what I remember. It doesn’t matter that I wasn’t actually born here, that I was born down the road in Leyton four years before my mother was moved here. This is what I remember.

The new builds sit on top of everything I once knew. They squash, hide and suppress my memories with their cheap yellow bricks until my mind forgets they were ever there. The new build houses were built in 2000, not that I was witness to any part of it. Fourteen years ago, this road was full of builders and workmen using diggers to forcibly rip out the foundations of my birth rite, laying new ones for other families, for other children.

The drain pipes placed within the raw damp ground will support the new homes and their new families. Not me. Drains must take away the filth right, otherwise where else would it go? Would it rot the foundations until they break?

When we left this road sixteen years ago, when I was twelve years old, we weren't leaving out of choice, although I knew my mother was happy to leave, we had to go, there was no other choice. They planned to demolish our small flat in Dyke Court during the year 2000, thirty-two years after they first built it. The small three-story building with its chipped balconies, depressed women, and reckless children was too realistic for them, 'a bit of an eyesore.'

As a child I loved nothing more than playing downstairs in the park which was disconnected from the back of the flats by a five-foot wide footpath. I remember running from my broken home with its dented front door, along the landing towards the lift and stairs which always stank of something soiled and sticky. The landing and stairs shared a concrete look which was decked with unreadable tag names like Skilva, stupid draw-

ings with sexual meanings and phone numbers with the signs 'ring for sex' or so and so 'is gay.'

The lift was small and metallic-looking, it could hold about four adults but was often out of order anyway. When it was working, the tenants must have let their dogs urinate in it because there were always acidic-reeking puddles in the corners. Me and my older sister dubbed them piss pools.

I once heard my mum say to Lorraine from next door she bet it was Margret's Jim that kept pissing in the lift on his way home from the pub, the old git couldn't hold it in 'til he got home. Whoever the owner of the wee was, I knew it stank more than Billy at school and we would avoid the lift at all costs.

After running down the three flights of stairs, jumping the bottom four steps of each flight till I reached the bottom, I would turn right to escape the building. On the left I see the entrance to the open car park and on my right, grass, grass probably overflowing with dog shit, but as a child I didn't care, I would run across its small space and turn right onto the five-foot wide pathway with the park right there. Any child's haven.

The park had two play areas like most parks, one for the younger children and one for the older ones. Behind the park was a fenced in 'field.' The field wasn't an open space, it was full of trees and overgrown grass like a wild forest and I didn't go in there alone. The older kids who would hang around the park drinking and smoking would always remind us younger ones about the mad man from number seven who

walked his dog in the field every night until one night he did so and returned home without him.

The stories varied from the mad man eating the dog because he was so hungry to the dog becoming a rabid beast, left alone in the field. I didn't wanna go in there anyway, there was nothing to do in there and it was full of shit.

As I stand on Gosport Road with what used to be the park behind the flats to my right, I look up to the sky and remember the block of flats that once extended up, blocking out its blueness. Its sharp, square corners routed into the ground, fixing us firmly to this place.

On the other side of the road, an unknown corner shop and a pet shop now exist. From my bedroom window all those years ago I used to see the Ringwood Castle pub which, in 2009, became Ali's All Night Shop and Pet Accessories with a flat above each shop. The shops have been operational for five years now but look like they've been standing a lot longer, the paint visibly washed out. They just look old.

Their design and appearance makes me feel like I've stepped back in time, but I know if I took that step, I'd be looking at the black painted front of the Ringwood Castle pub, its window frames and welcoming door a bright white, while its name, big and bold in gold block frames, stood proud at the top.

Every Sunday, the same entertainer would sing me and my big sister to sleep with Crocodile Shoes, and, although

the neighbours would moan it was too loud, let alone way too late, it was our private lullaby. The gentle cords of the guitar drowned out the wild world around us while I marvelled at how perfect the woman must have been to make Jimmy sing from his soul like that.

Behind the Ringwood Castle's back garden was, and still is, the cemetery which is entered through Queens Road, literally a five minutes' walk from Gosport Road. Walking up Gosport road, following it round to my old primary school, then through the alley, turning left, crossing the road, then right, up that road then left again, will take you to the entrance.

I would see this cemetery's eleven acres from my window over sixteen years ago, although its residents began to stay a lot longer before that. Walthamstow's Queens Road cemetery opened in 1872.

I used to walk through this cemetery's intertwining paths when I was out to play as a child and I remember the loose pebbly ground would generate dust under my feet as I walked on it, dirtying the headstones and flowers. Walking again now, sixteen years later, I retrace my worn steps and still the dust rises and dirties the flowers.

All paths lead here and all the paths here lead to an abstract church-like altar in the center of the cemetery. Its pointed roof points to the sky while its black-and-white clock counts the seconds of life, any life, all life, and my life.

Larna Bobby Lou (Mayhew) is a poet and writer of prose, she is a mother to three children, and special educational needs teaching assistant. Larna holds a BA degree in English Literature which was completed with a strand of Creative Writing and plans to complete her PGCE Secondary English teacher training degree in 2021. Larna has previously been published by RDW, a poetic anthology which publishes poems written in response to Instagram prompts. She has also been accepted to be published by Bandit Fiction, and most notably, Larna Bobby Lou has been published by Cambridge-Hall Poetry Journal, December 2020 edition, for her poem 'Lonely Phones & Internet Woes.' Larna has also self-published her first anthology, ...An Open Book... which is available to buy on Amazon, as well as finalising her second anthology which she plans to send off to a select few poetry presses. You can find Larna on Instagram as @larna_bobby_lous_words, on Twitter as @Larnas_words, and at her personal blog, <https://lbpoemsandmore.wixsite.com/mysite>.

Bobcats and Wild Hogs

by J. David Thayer

Snow began fallin that afternoon. The sort a storm that pounds for hours. By morning the ground would be hidden under eight inches a new snow. Pa'd come home just before dark but he never took off his coat.

I could hear him and Mama fighting in the bedroom. Weren't nothing new. Usually when they'd start in I'd head out ta the shed and go back ta working hides. Tanning's hard work but it keeps ya focused on what yous doin. I's pretty good at it. But I didn't do that this time. I stayed an listened. Theys some-thin different in they voices I'd never heard before. Caught my attention. Theys desperate, but not like cause we was hungry or couldn't pay the note. I know what that sounds like. This was somethin different. It bothered me and it should have. I caught some of what theys sayin through the walls.

"Stephen! Ya can't shoot em all, damn it! They'll kill you an then they'll find us! An ya know what they'll do to us! To our children!"

"That's why I have to go, Jean. Comes to us either way. Ain't no other shelter for a thousand acres in ever direc-tion. They know their way about these woods an they'll find us. This way I catch em unawares. I got plenty a shells. I can do it. It's our only chance anyway."

“Theys a dozen of em if theys two! How many shots ya think youc’n get off fore they kill you?”

“I’m doing this and theres an end to it!”

The door opened.

“Jeremiah! You been listening to things ya ain’t supposed to, boy?”

“I reckon.” Why fear a whoopin now?

“Snot-nosed bastard! Always was a mama’s boy. Fact is I don’t know as you has any a me in ya at all. But we ain’t got time ta sort that out. Right now ya need to know some things. Listen ta me. The Morley Gang’s back. Theys down by the creek right now. Spotted ‘em when I made my last pick right before I come in. That blizzard comin is serious. They’ll need outta the snow come mornin an that’ll drive em straight here. Member when they come through Springfield last summer, don’t cha?”

I did. A course I did. We all knew what they done. Farmers an ranchers hanged an butchered an all their stores pilaged. Barns set afire an nothin’ left alive on the place but those flames ablazin away, licking on the bones of another ruined homestead. You’d see the smoke off in the distance an follow it an always find the same thing but too late ta help. An if ya coulda gotten there, you’d be just as dead right along with em. We knowed all a them families and a couple of they kids was good friends a mine.

“Then you know why I have ta go down there an kill em all.”

That was a crazy idea, but I did understand. What the hell else could he do? Just one a them things can’t be helped. Seem like sometimes the only thing they is ta do is head straight off inta hell bent on doin somethin ya already knowed ya can’t. Ya gonna lose an ya gonna go anyway. It’s bad luck, I guess, but that don’t change the facts.

“Ya have ta protect ya mama an Little Anna. An I need ya ta tend them traps we set on the west ridge too. Good chance we snagged a cat up that way. Seen some tracks two mornings back. That snow’ll ruin the pelt fore it thaws. Can’t wait. Now we done good this winter. Theys money enough to make it well inta spring. Hear me, boy?”

“Yessir.”

“Alright then.”

That was the last thing he ever said ta me. I was just as scared as Mama but I knowed more words wouldn’t change nothin. Words. My grandad always said: ya can cook bacon, but ya can’t cook a promise. Finally made some sense. Pa picked up his thirty aught six an three boxes a shells an he headed out into the cold an the dark. Little Anna began to sob. I lied to her an promised everything would be alright.

Leghold traps don't care who ya are or what y'are. Step on one an it bites ya. Squirrels an rabbits found em often enough an theys good eatin. But bobcat is the real prize. Fifty good rabbits can't match one decent bobcat. A good pelt'd fetch twenty dollars in cash an twice that in trade. But sometimes the traps also caught wild hogs. Theys dangerous an useless besides. We never et em. No one ever et em I ever heard about.

When I's young I asked Pa why we weren't gonna eat a hog we just shot when I knowed we hungry an broke an he said it was on account a hogs is dirty an evil. Said they has a piece a the devil inside em an if you et one you'd be the same way. Worse off than starvin. Nobody on the mountain eats them hogs. Don't matter how lean the crops come in. If they sprung a trap, ya always found em alive an snarlin an eager ta rip ya asunder. I looked a few in the eyes a time or two an I seen what Pa was talkin about. Feral but more'n that. Legion's livestock. The other animals know it same as Pa. If ya found one in a trap ya shot it from a ways off an then drug it off somewheres an not even the coyotes or buzzards would get after it. Carcass would just lay right there where you left it, stinkin an rottin an still whole until all the flesh withered up an the bones bleached in the sun. Look like a new dinosaur after about two months or so. An still you steered clear of it.

Pa was a superstitious man. Winter told him everthin he needed ta know about the year ahead. If the traps caught hogs, he knowed we was in for hard times. Started puttin back extra grain an stashin coins in coffee cans and whatnot. But if we happened to bag a bobcat, Pa'd feel real good about things. He'd get a little spendy an each a us'd get a few extras here an

there. It really didn't make no sense ta me, but somehow things did normally seem ta line up about like Pa said they would. If you was of a mind ta look at it that a way. I always thought it said more about Pa than it did anything else, but it pro'ly never said nothin' about anything either way. But I drank my root beer when he'd buy me some just the same.

Morning came an I did what I's told. Like I tried ta do ever day. I headed off in the general direction of the west ridge, but findin the traps amongst the drifts was not gonna be easy. The sun was bright on the snow an it was hard ta see. I squinted hard against it. When I shut out as much light as I could an quit tryin' ta see anything at all, I smelled it for the first time. A faint whiff a smoke on the wind an some other stench I couldn't quite place. Death an heat an old somehow. I forced open my eyes an I looked around the ridge with my hands cupped over my forehead. I seen a campfire in a clearing some five-hundred yards away. Men were there. Pa was there.

Couldn't make sense a none of it. I knowed Pa's coat even at that distance. The creek where theys supposed ta be was three miles off t'other way. They shoulda not been there at all. As for what Pa was doin' in they camp was somethin' else altogether. I figured he needed savin an I was readyin m'self ta try. Maybe he'd got off a few shots an then they took him. That had ta be it. That or somethin like it. But Pa shore didn't look it. He just set there same as the rest of 'em.

I crouched as low as I could manage an made for the treeline. They didn't make me. Trappers know how ta move

quietly in the woods. I had enough cover ta sneak up on em near as fifty yards or so. I set there watchin the Morley Gang an my Pa an what theys doin and I couldn't half believe none of it. Theys right there in front a me, but it weren't even real. None of it. If not for the cold up ta ma knees I'd a thought I's home abed an dreamin. But I wasn't. It was real alright.

Two facts was as clear as sun comin up and I had ta catch up ta both of em real quick. Either one of em woulda been more'n enough for one day. The first un was Pa never went out inta them woods ta kill nobody in the Morley Gang. Oh, no. He was in the gang hisself. No doubt about that. Truth is, they looked like they's followin his lead if anything. The second fact mighta been even worse. Theys all settin around that fire eatin, an over that fire they had a wild hog turnin on they spit. An they was lickin they fingers an gobblin at the bones like wa-termelon rind in late summer. An they couldn't seem ta get enough of it. Like hog grease was gold an eating gold was the best thing a man could ever do. I seen a lot a hunger in my day an they beat everthing. Pa most of all.

Suddenly Pa looks over in my direction. I ducked down under a boulder real quick an then I peeked up over it again. He was still lookin my way. I sorta eased up an sat up straight an tried ta work out whether he's really looking at me or just at somethin else in the woods. Then I swear he nodded at me. Not sos anybody else in the camp'd notice. Just a little. An then he nodded with his head ta point me back down the trail the way I come in. Sendin me back home. Was this always the plan?

I left out quiet as I could. But when I felt I's far enough away, I ran as hard as I could, in the knee-deep snow, carvin' out post holes with ever step. I's crying while I's running an I never knowed a person could do that. At first I's confused an then I wasn't confused no more. I's absolutely sure. An bein sure was way worse'n not understanding an still feeling good about keepin some doubt. Old mysteries about my pa began ta solve themselves in my mind. Pa was gone sometimes an no one ever knowed where. Sometimes clothes were bloodied when he come home from trappin an theys burned rather'n washed. Hard as we had ta work ta get clothes at all made ya notice things like that. An more'n all a that, an because a all that, I knowed one thing more: he was leadin his gang away from us, but Pa was sayin goodbye in doin it. He wanted me ta find em settin there sos I'd know it an could tell it without anybody arguin about it.

I got back ta the cabin outta all the breath I'd normally collect an spend in a week's time, an I told Mama the truth Pa wanted her ta know. Said I'd seen the Morley Gang shoot Pa an drag his body off somewheres down the mountain. We'd never find it an there weren't no point in lookin for it. I held her as she sobbed an I told her everything'd be alright an I believed that. But Mama use ta help him burn all them clothes an she never wanted ta talk about why he went missing ever so often. So who knows what she knowed an didn't know this whole time. Me least of all. I'll just let that simmer.

After Ma got out a good cry she went into Little Anna's room an told her Pa weren't coming back. That was more'n I wanted to see an I'd seen plenty that mornin. I slipped

outside an finished checking the traps up along t'other side of our land. As far away from the west ridge as I could get without trespassin. Some traps was disturbed too. Good signs.

We stayed pretty steady from that day after. Enough rabbits an squirrels ta get us by alright, along with Pa's money tucked away. I knowed about his coffee cans an I think he wanted me to. Made it to spring, anyway, an then we was in the clear. Even though nothing really changes, everything always feels easier once spring gets here.

Never saw a bobcat that whole winter. Still ain't seen one. Not even tracks. But they'll be back one day, I expect. They ain't really left, truth told. Seen some hogs though, crossin' the west ridge. They say theys more these days than they usta be. Invasive. Long shadows at dusk. Squeals in the dark. Fields all tore up come mornin. They stop to rest a spell an ya feel it all up ya neck. But it don't last. Wait it out, I learnt. Breathe an stay quiet. Wait and watch. Soon enough they'll head off some-where else.

J. David Thayer is an educator living in Texas. His works have appeared in 24-Hour Short Story Contest (2nd Place), The First Line, The Last Line, Fantasy/Sci-Fi Film Festival, Flash Fiction Magazine, Bewildering Stories, 101 Word Stories, Tall Tale TV, Black Petals, Farther Stars Than These, Terror House Magazine, 50-Word Stories, The Drabble, 365 Tomorrows, 42 Stories Anthology, Scarlet Leaf Review, Sirens Call eZine, Teleport Magazine, Sci-Fi Lampoon, The Free Bundle, Piker Press, Ink & Sword Magazine, Bandit Fiction, Flashes, and Pilcrow & Dagger.

Lobsters

by Kaleena Madruga

My new boss is on the shorter side. He has a bald head and a big smile, and he wears a suit that is not tailored to his stocky frame. I enter the dimly lit bar and shake his hand, he says welcome with a forced toothy grin, telling me his name is Rudy. He introduces me to the bartender, whose name I forget instantly.

Rudy shows me around, pointing at things, describing them. He tells me what time to come in on the days I work, and where to put my things. He hands me my new work shirt, it's crisp and white. My new boss tells me that we only get two of these and if I want more I will have to buy my own. I nod seriously.

I follow Rudy into the kitchen next. He shows me how to taste each of our sauces, how to know if they are good or bad. He lets me taste a lemon dressing and asks what I think of it. Four members of the kitchen crew stare at me and I say that it tastes good. The tallest kitchen member blinks.

Not really. Too sour, he says. He looks at the kitchen staff and they nod their heads, mumble a little. It's okay to tell them when it's not good, he says. I try to look

agreeable but I know that I will never tell them anything about any dressings.

Rudy takes me to the area where the freezers are. The freezer door opens and an icy cloud puffs out and covers us. He reaches inside and pulls out a large red lobster. I take a tentative step back, watching the antenna wiggle at me. The creature's claws are sealed closed with green rubber bands.

Do you like lobster? Rudy asks. His smile reminds me of a clown.

To eat? Sort of, I say.

He roughly throws the lobster back in the freezer and I wince.

The freezer door slams shut and I ask Rudy if all the lobsters, stacked on top of each other with their claws rubber banded closed, are alive in there.

Yep, he says.

I must look sad because he touches my shoulder.

Don't become a lobster in your next life, he says.

It's the day before my bridal shower my mom, grandma, and I go out for seafood. Are you sure you don't want the octopus? the waiter says to me. It's our best seller. I shake my head. I know that octopi are the smartest, most sensitive of all the sea animals. Their colors change when they're distressed. They can solve puzzles.

My grandma orders the lobster roll but only has two bites.

What's wrong with your food? my mother asks her.

Oh nothing, my grandmother says, looking away. My mom looks pissed.

She's always been like that, my mother later says to me in the restroom. She washes her hands aggressively. She can't ever just say what's wrong.

At the bridal shower my grandmother trips on the stairs in front of us and cries and says she wishes she never came at all.

Are you hurt? I ask her, but she just cries and waves me away.

Don't pay attention to her, my mom says with my hand on my shoulder. She squints into the sun.

When I was younger we'd go to my great grandmother's house once a week. She mostly only spoke Portuguese and her teeth were in a jar in the bathroom, but she seemed happy to see me and my brother always. My cousins would take us to their garage tanks and yank the lobsters out of the water and shove them in our little faces. I'd cry and cling on to my dad's leg and he'd laugh. *Go wash your face*, he always said to me. *Go clean yourself up*.

I'm working at another seafood restaurant and I'm the oldest hostess here, which is embarrassing. I don't take any of my restaurant jobs seriously, but no one else will hire me. We are required to wear high heels as part of the uniform, and knives are stabbing my feet. I keep rocking back and forth on my feet while this boss, Gueneviere, tells me about the lobster tank.

Stand still, she says. Guests can pick their lobster here, she tells me, her open palm gesturing at the tank. The lobsters' claws are free but they are stacked on top of each other and the tank is small.

Are they all from the same family? I ask.

What? she says. She looks angry. I shake my head and say, *Sorry, continue*.

When the guest chooses their lobster the chef will prepare it. The lobster chef or whatever he is called reaches inside the tank and the lobsters try without much success to get out of the way. He puts the lobster on the counter and sticks a knife in its head before splitting it open.

Lobsters don't have a central nervous system, so they can't feel pain, he says.

It's nicer than boiling them alive, my boss nods.

When my shift ends I go home and google lobster central nervous system. I know now that the chef lied to me to make me feel better, but I still can't sleep.

Kaleena Madruga received her BA in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University and her MFA in Creative Writing from Roosevelt University. She lives in Chicago with her partner Chris and their dog Pickle. Instagram: @kaleenarayewrites. Website: kaleenamadruga.com.

Three Pieces

by Elyssa Tappero

“Obsolescence”

My words are a species on the verge of extinction. At this point I should probably just give up on sustaining a viable breeding population; there are no wild ones left and those in captivity are so interbred they're hardly recognizable. It's not like people are clamoring to save them, anyway, or will even notice when the last one exhales its final caged breath. Guess it's just time to move on, time to relegate the poor things to the annals of forgotten history along with all the other literary failures that exist now only in attic trunks and basement boxes. It's fine; I'll always have my memories, won't I? I'm sure those keep the dodo warm at night and bring much comfort to the thylacine.

“Opportunity”

It is time to rest, brave one. Your father has been dead these seven years and now you must follow him into the Undiscovered Country. You have traveled far and seen many things no one else ever has; take your discoveries and images back to him with our gratitude. Thanks to you two we have walked among the stars, we have tread in red dust, we have touched the loneliness and vastness of space. Sleep now, faithful friend, and wait out the storm. Perhaps someone will find you one day and stir your cold heart, open your darkened eyes, but it will not be us. We will be long gone by then, a fading memory of a half-buried ruin on a dead planet fifty-four million kilometers from where you lay. Forgive us our trespasses, for we refuse to forgive those who trespass against us. We have done much evil in our time, and even now we hasten our end, but at least we have done this one good thing. At least we birthed you and sent you forth to explore where we could not go. Stay safe, child of science and mankind's yearning for knowledge. Dream great dreams. You are our legacy.

*"before you give up
your bones
to my graveyard"*

Take this last precious ship from this dying planet and go, go journey into the inhospitable depths of space and find the door torn in the fabric of our reality. Pass through to a new place, a new time, somewhere so very far from here where perhaps out of ten thousand hostile lands you may find one, just one, with gentle arms to guide you to a safe landing. Even if this new home does not exist you deserve at least to try, to abandon this wreckage of a world and perish in the struggle for life somewhere else. No hope can grow anymore in this dead earth; take your last little seed and fly away, fly away from here before you give up your bones to my graveyard. And if you do make it to some happier home, somewhere and sometime far from here, try to remember me fondly. I was not always a desert. I knew once how to love.

Elyssa Tappero is a queer pagan who writes fragments of prose and poetry about mental illness, the gods, the agony of writing, and how it feels to be alive for the end of the world (which is pretty not great) in hopes of touching others who might feel the same. You can find all of her work for free at www.onlyfragments.com and follow her on Twitter at @OnlyFragments.



Untitled Aerial View

Jacy Zhang

Jacy Zhang studies English at the University of Maryland.

Her photography was recently published in Riggwelter, The Lumiere Review, the winnow magazine, and elsewhere.

You can find her on Twitter @JacylZhang.

Poetry

how old are you?

by silas denver melvin

20, unless you subtract the years i spent
as a discarded bullet shell. do you mean

how long have i been a man
or do you want the bitter bite of truth
that comes with bleeding into a new age?

i don't remember the exact date
but really, does anyone recall their birth?

what was the pushing factor to make this choice?

when you free fall from a plane,
you experience hypoxia. go unconscious
with enough time to wake up
before the the ground renders you nothing
but paper maché met with a machete kiss.

my parachute jammed. my phone
disconnected. i ate my vegetables &
never grew an inch. what other choice
did i have?

how has this experience shaped you as a person?

o teetering beetle carcass. o skinned banana flesh.
the unfortunate reality of the autopsy
is you'll be most valuable & vulnerable then,
made treasure by your sacrifice,
 your scarification,
but never again can you return to the living.
i cannot explain to you that sort of shame.
the the sterile disgust in knowing
 you've died & martyred
& all you're worth is a stack of medical notes.

could you try to explain? just try?

the line between slaughter & enthusia
is intention. i am gagging on bleach,
 searching for fellow lab rats.
someone is tracking me.
someone is telling me possession
is the best sort of love
 & im tired enough to believe them.

silas denver melvin is a trans masculine poet from New Hampshire, US.
He has been published with SCAB, The Scorpion, Toyon Lit, and
Doghouse Press among other outlets. More of his work can be
found on instagram @sweatermuppet.

Bookish

by Katrina R. Lippolis

The nerd in me won't let me be
I have read & read & read
But I prefer to write instead
Words --
Words are my getaway
I write them with the sway of my pen
Placing them to paper or with the stroke of a key
Creating line by line, poetry that touches souls deeper than me
Relating to the weakest of persons
Bringing smiles to the coldest of hearts
I'm not bookish
I'm write-ish
A literary Willy Wonka
I share my world of pure imagination

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I'm not bookish
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A literary Willy Wonka
I share my world of pure imagination

Katrina R. Lippolis, is a self-published author with three books of poetry under her belt; *The Way We Fall: Love Amid the Thistles*, *The Moon is Ours: Dance Among the Stars & Despair Spare Me Not* as well as her first ever YA interracial romance, *Coffee*, coming this January. Her writing journey began at the age of 19, creating poetry in her personal journal everyday up until age 23. By age 34 she felt the urge to write fan fiction revolving around the kpop group BTS (Bangtan Sonyeondan) eventually directing her thoughts to writing her first historical fiction novel, *Where the Wallflowers Grow*, which has been on hiatus since November 2019 after producing over 30 chapters. Katrina continues to share her poetry daily on social media & her website - *An Average Writers Life* (katrinalippolis.weebly.com). She looks forward to producing more books of poetry and short stories in 2021 & beyond.

Harmonic Analysis

by Lillie Franks

Up and down and up and down. Up and famine. Boom and bust. Life and down. Harmonic analysis breaks all motion into constituent frequencies. Oscillation. You are always rising until you are falling. Up and down. Scared and okay. Sad and okay. Okay and trying so hard to be okay. The frequency is inversely proportional to the period, which is the time between now and the next time I feel like now. The period is finite. Down and up. Down and out. Harmonic analysis is the analysis of harm. Harmonic analysis breaks all motion down into always going and never arriving. Up and down. Up and the other shoe dropping. Up and away. Down. There is always a going down. You cannot forget this. You cannot escape this. It is oscillation. Down. This is the way wheel turns. This is the period. The ground doesn't save you from falling; it breaks you for it. The ground breaks down all motion. Down. There is one tangent and you fall along it forever. Down. You will feel better. You will feel this way again. Down. Harmonic analysis breaks down motion. Break down. Period.

Whatever can be broken down can be built up.

This is the way the wheel turns.

Harmonic analysis is the building up of any motion whatsoever from oscillating frequency.

Any motion whatsoever.

Lillie Franks is a trans author and teacher who lives in Chicago, Illinois with the best cats. You can read her work at places like Sword and Kettle Press, Poemeleon, and NonBinary Review or follow her on Twitter at @onyxaminelife. She loves anything that is not the way it should be.

"Barnum and Bailey"

by Natalie Marino

That night before I couldn't sleep.
Daddy came again to tuck me in.
I asked if it ever snowed in Pittsburgh
on Thanksgiving, *Yes. It did one time.*

Running into the plane, my sister whispered
This is how it feels to be real, and then we coughed
the entire flight, behind the last row
of the smoking section.

We flew through a rainstorm on our way there.
The pilot welcomed us to the steel city
but I did not see any outside my tiny window,
just blue landing lights.

Grandpa picked us up in a small Chrysler.
There wasn't snow anywhere,
just black mountainsides.
He took us to the circus.

The tent was pink and we were in the
front row, close enough to see the elephants' sad eyes.
We smiled the whole performance, remembering how
Grandpa grew up in a train car.

On the way home he drove us on yellow bridges.
Grandma made a pot roast.
She grabbed my hand when I tried
to take a bite without praying first.

Natalie Marino is a mixed-race writer, mother, and physician. Her work
appears or is forthcoming in Barren Magazine, Capsule Stories,
Leon Literary Review, Literary Mama, Moria Online, and other jour-
nals.

3 Poems
by Augie Park

An Idle Dream

An idle dream I dreamt in Spring
Only to pine in the Summer winds
When the Autumn leaves dropped like dew
To feel Winter come with the first snowfall
Heavy tracks in the white terrain
Tracks that led back to you

Into The Depths

I wish someone told me the dangers of water
How it ebbs
How it stretches
How it flows

I wish I was warned about the dangers of water
The depth
The mystery
The glow

I wish I knew the dangers of water
No one ever told me about the beauty it holds

Bow to the queen

When she was young
The streets move to her beat
The crowds parted in defeat
When she was young

A glance, a look
Was all it took
For the crowds to fall at her feet
When she was young

When he was old
He understood

That time stood still
For no one but her

When he was old
He understood

A sigh, a sigh
Was all it took
For the crowd to know
The city was hers
When she was young

Augie Park is a poet and fiction writer.
For poetry, she focuses on digital musings, dreams,
and memories. For writing, she focuses on fantasy
world building with a touch of historical drama.
Augie is a Korean-born Midwest native
who resides in Minnesota.

An uncomfortably delayed echo
by Meredith Phipps

of a sharpness I tried to feel
months ago, pushing
into my good days now
that I've decided to be
done with sharpness
for good - mine and others.

of a puncture wound I did not feel
months ago, reopening
under hardened skin
that I've been trying to
soften with time
for good - now and the coming nows.

Meredith Phipps (she/her) is a current undergraduate student at Barnard College where she studies English and works as a Writing Fellow. She bounces back and forth between Manhattan and northern Indiana. She typically writes poems about whatever she can't get off her mind.

(twitter: @merzil999).

3 Poems

by Ryan Purcell

Hollows

and things that fill them

There were times when I thought, this is it -
This is when we finally know each other
and our nebula can
venn-diagram blend
into entities both distinct
and one.

But individuals who are not allowed
to have belts or shoelaces,
have a skewed definition of romance.
The clinical fluorescence of the room,
and both of us so familiar with paper gowns.
Time spent in close quarters
waiting with what's left
of your family.

Mine had prior engagements.
As together as we could be
We took our hopes and dreams
mended the seams,
then inflated them again
with helium.

But that void grew in your belly
and I'd rest my face against your skin
and feel him kick through tiny cell walls
as the incongruity between us got louder
and louder
until it was palpable as the wailing he let out
when the nurses used that nipple thing
to suck the shit out of his choked throat
and he shouted something shattered
at this newborn world.
The room cracked and shifted.
I was high at the time but the gravity of the moment wasn't lost
on me.
I'm bad with birthdays but I never forget his.
Not anymore.
Tears streamed down our faces,

separate,
us three.
The doctor left to wash and give us time
and I never loved anything as much
as I loved in that moment
and my insignificance to the process
made visceral my solitude
as my soul flailed against this fleshy prison
that binds it to alone
and keeps me from him,
and you, and sunk our doomed marriage
and will make him hate me as an angsty teen.
Sometimes the right words struggle to show up,
like me.

Scented Candles

Our problems
dissolved in

language
and often
the turbulence of ordinary days
turned into resentments

and all of that built up –
all the motions of ordinary love
I always worried
about saying too much
or not enough.

Along the line between
what is
and what should be
runs a brave, naïve hope
that what I think of you
matches what you think of me.

Tiny dots on the timeline,
and Hate on a necklace.
We each spoke hard truths,
the phrasing was reckless.
Locked down in my room
we watched the world burn

between sex and mutual tears
masks yanked over our eyes
and fingers in each other's ears.
Now time moves through me
- and I through it.
When good things inevitably fade
I have trouble with it.
I think the immense task of becoming vulnerable makes me re-
luctant to give up
the connection once I have.
But that's my thing –

my own shit.
I was lazy to place the burden elsewhere.
It's easier not to face what's in front of or between us.
I don't know much.
Life opens up.
"I've been listening to such and such..."

The pinnacle of your beauty
can stand monumental
from afar
- and I'll thank you in silence.
The strength garnered from the situation
shed light on the uncomfortable
gap between you
and I and
us and
them

and the futility of words
to bring ill-fitting parts

together.
But in the brief flutter of a plastic lash falling
I'll send frail hope
into the depthless black
of whoever's eyes -
because what else is there but
to hinge life on wishes blown
on artificial eyelashes.

Chasing Last Fall

Slow somber days when she just wants something to take her
breath away.

Sometimes smoke just won't cut it.

The summation of the day
upon reflection in the evening
is a collage of almost feelings
half-finished thoughts.

Autumn scented candles burnt in Spring.

She always wants something but struggles to name the thing.

Solace breaks even in the evening.

"Say pretty words."

At the time they went unheard.

Ryan Purcell is an artist from New York currently based in Florida. He writes about communication and things he finds beautiful. His work appears in dark corners of the internet here and there. Email: purcell1249@gmail.com Twitter: @weepywords

*Like endometrial lining
through a cervix,
these are the days of my life*
by Megan Cannella

Like endometrial lining through a cervix, these are the days of
my life

because of course my vagina goes nowhere, connects to nothing
Ros Anderson, *The Hierarchies*

When I was little,
my kindergarten teacher taught us how to tell time on a bright
yellow, fake clock.

We spun its dials,
hours and minutes so easily pushed and shoved, never resisting
our manipulation.

But as I get older,
my uterus tells me more about time than even the best Casio.

And I really mean that.

I think my uterus is more reliable than even the cool Casio with a calculator.

You see,

a clock or a watch will tell me when it was, when it is, and when it will be.

But it was the blood

creeping out of my vagina that told me when I should start being really scared,

not in that folkloric, stranger-danger way,

but in that visceral way that washes over you when you realize you don't always have control,

over your body,
that this body you're so familiar with can be weaponized
against you.

My uterus contracts,
time shifts, my body slowly becomes more mine, less weapon.

Reading clots like tea leaves,
to decipher signs of stress or unfortunate false starts

Sloughing endometrial lining,
delivered safely into another cycle, inching closer to a new season.

Megan Cannella (@megancannella) is a Midwestern transplant currently living in Nevada. For over a decade, Megan has bounced between working at a call center, grad school, and teaching. She has work in or forthcoming from @PorcupineLit, @dailydrunkmag, @VerseZine, @TBQuarterly, and @perhappened.

2 Poems
by Larna Bobby Lou

Whose Time

The construction of time has been
definitively defined by someone
whose hand isn't mine.
The numbers and notions
you've engraved on my wrist
and into my mind,
you hypothesise,
should somehow have the power to write my life.
Control me to the point of losing my mind
because I have no time,
when really my time is mine to be defined.
Whose time, your time
has no time to waste time.
Not mine.

If my time is perfectly out of sync with yours,
am I late or are you irrational
through your inability to read my time,
my hours,
which are measured by
my own mind.
I bend all reasoning so that your ageing time
does not pass through mine.
Mine is divinely counting something
your numbers simply cannot define.
My seconds are feelings,
my hours, moments,
my days are memories,
my years, life.
Let me take you by the hand
and I will show you,
in time,
that your logic is killing you.
Mine is keeping me alive.

Dreaming You

I remember you, the you you've never met.
The one I've made up in my dreams and awake.
The only way I've ever been able to have you.

Feel you live, feel your touch, feel you and your entirety so
much that now I
know how it feels to have you without ever actually having you.
I already know.

Counting the scenarios, a million ways on all the days I can
dream, my attempt
to trick fate into fixing this mistake, changing everything I can
possibly conceive
into everything conceivable.
Just you.

So much time has passed but you've not aged a day dream.

Our first lives begin at this stage.
We were, we are, still teenagers.

Just falling into those desperately fast almost panicked days
which leave us
dazed as dizzying dances of us connect and circle in my brain
because nothing
else matters but you.

I don't need to worry about the ever-changing complexities of
 'life' because
I've already made countless ones for us and nothing else matters
but you.

It's not even us.
Just you.

The you I've created or the you you know, they must be one of
 the same
because I need it to be so.
In-between my dreams and awake, in that softer, somehow
slower state, there
is a space where I create the times that's everything we need to
 just, be.

You.
And me.

Larna Bobby Lou is a mother to three children, a special
educational needs teaching assistant, who holds a
BA degree in English Literature, which was completed
with a strand of Creative Writing. She has been
writing privately for years and has finally decided
to start submitting her literary works for the world to see!

<https://lbpoemsandmore.wixsite.com/mysite>
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2 Poems by Shelly Jones

Absent

She kneels before the grave, its face blanched,
letterings weathered, rendered unintelligible

on ash colored slate. Frost stings her skin
as she lights the match, cups it tenderly

against December winds until the flame
catches, curling leaf, sallow blossoms - bells

that ring out to the dead as they wither and burn,
calling them from their shallow, clay beds.

She sucks in a breath, holds the smoke,
burning absinthe, in her lungs, dares not

close her eyes as she waits for the ground
before her to shift, pallid limb to sprout

before exhaling. Like rhizomes, cold lead stalks
from nearby graves creep closer, whisper: stay.

To Lift a Curse

Her days are spent stalking dust
bunnies in lost corners, sleepily stretching to reach
untapped rays of carpeted sunshine.
Whiskers twitch, shrugging off the daylight.

At night, I breathe loose strands of her fur
matted into my pillow. From the depths
I hear her padding, paws purposeful,
hunting me. She drags a string
clutched in her teeth, wails, summons me,
trills echoing up the stairwell, tail
waving behind her sleek, black body.

I turn, grunt nonsense, wonder
what time it is - again.
I grab the string, flail languidly,
my arm spasming in half-sleep.

What she wants, why she sniffs at my pillow,
carves her incantations in the wooden nightstand,
I cannot unlock. Her meows beg me to do something,
but what and why, I cannot fathom. I sink,
my eyelids flicker at the nightly serenade
scratch scritch brrrrreeeoow,
fold under the weight of the day.

Where did this shredded fiber come from?
It is not an old shoelace filched from the closet's
depths or a bit of yarn snipped from a skein.
Where has she found this wondrous
line she drops so earnestly at my bedside each night?

What does she expect of me?
Must I skip rope three times without my feet catching?
Burn the string in the waning fire, boil it in a pot,
steep it in my kettle and drink deeply of its bitter draught?
Salt it in a bowl, consume it in one long spiraling slurp,
watch as she sheds her catskin in an unfurling
curlicue like paring an apple?

Or must I bind her paw to my palm, string
cutting fur and flesh until our blood unites?

Morning peels open and she kneads
her way into my lap, licks her chest twice,
rests her weary head down. One eye slits open
staring at the discarded string at my feet,
waits until nightfall.

Shelly Jones, PhD is an Associate Professor of English at SUNY Delhi,
where she teaches classes in mythology, literature, and writing. Her
speculative work has been published in Podcastle, Luna Station
Quarterly, New Myths, The Future Fire, and Liminality.

Ensemble

by Tara Wheeler

I think we're still there.
Out on the common, watching
the horses' half-light charge,
wading through sun-dried grass
to the pond.

I think we're still building
sandcastles in Lyme Regis,
and I think you're still
guarding your chips
from those seagulls.

I think I'm still waking up
to that call from your mum
and I think I'm still calling her back
because I couldn't take in
what she'd said.

I think we're still lighting lanterns
for you in Liquorice Park,
and I think you're still laughing
and rolling cigarettes with us
in Liquorice Park.

I think we're still swimming
on Port Meadow, and watching
the sun set on Port Meadow,
and making our way across
her half-year frozen lake.

I think we're still kissing
in the rain, in Turin, and deciding
to get married in Lisbon.
I think we're still holding
our daughter for the first time.

I think every moment might be
a note that keeps on playing,
and I think sometimes
we can all still hear
the whole melody.

Tara Wheeler lives in Cambridge, UK, with a scientist, a singing toddler,
and a part-time cat. Her work has most recently appeared in *The*
Adriatic, *Perhappend*, and *The Mum Poet Press*. She tweets
@WheelerTara

I think I'm about to give up

by Sergio Ortiz

Today I saw how sloppy I am. It
took me all day
to clean a one-bedroom apartment.

Every once in a while
I can see myself years ahead,
as if there were that many years
left to savor, shimmering
like a virgin forest in the sun.

What do you do
when you know your best
isn't going to be enough
to interest another man?

Perhaps I need
a little more eyeliner.
Of course, I could ask Jane Fonda
to lend me her black
go-go boots.

Sergio Ortiz is a retired English literature professor and bilingual poet. His recent credits include Spanish audio poems in GATO MALO Editing, an important Spanish Caribbean publication, Maleta Illegal, a South American journal, Indolent Books, HIV HERE AND NOW. His poems are also forthcoming in Storyscape and Unlikely Stories.

Crone, Part Two

by Leah Mueller

Through my curved
bathroom mirror, I
inspect sunspots
and jowls. My eyes

grow invisible cataracts,
bleary from the weight
of all they have witnessed,
all they have left to see.

Next week, bifocals
and eventually, surgery.

Pink wire-rims
and UV-resistant sunglasses
worn even on cloudy days.

The light discovers
a hidden door to my retinas.

Dream of desert afternoons,
filtered rays on smooth,
unwrinkled skin. Instead,

dark moles around my eyes,
invisible until last year,
fungus beneath my nails.

How far I have come.
How far I must go.
So much road alone
with my torn, faded map.

Skin turns, relentless,
to paper, then cinders.

Leah Mueller is an indie writer and spoken word performer from Bisbee, Arizona. Her most recent books, "Misguided Behavior, Tales of Poor Life Choices" (Czykmate Press), "Death and Heartbreak" (Weasel Press), and "Cocktails at Denny's" (Alien Buddha) were released in 2019. Leah's work appears in Midway Journal, Citron Review, The Spectacle, Miracle Monocle, Outlook Springs, Atticus Review, Your Impossible Voice, and elsewhere. Her essay "Firebrand, The Radical Life and Times of Annie Besant" appears in the book, "Fierce, Essays By and About Dauntless Women" which placed first in the non-fiction division of the 2019 Publisher's Weekly Booklife contest.

A Game
by Emma Bider

My grandmother speaks to me in scrabble tiles,
(Odd, dust, kiss, quilts).
I speak to her in memories.

She does the crossword in the morning,
I move my pen around the grid,
Not always being helpful.

We watch Jeopardy most evenings,
If I'm back from school,
if I didn't miss the last train home,
If it's then and not now.

My room is cold. I play
The how-long-can-I-stay-in-bed game,
(Ice, nice, curate, quit).
My grandmother's already awake,
Her room's colder.

I play the which-train-will-I-make game,
Shovelling snow off the front porch
With too much force,
Too little finesse.

Sometimes I take the garbage out because she doesn't ask me to,
Scrape off the car for the same reason.
I make a trail of salt in the snow so deep it forms
A dream line from her house to my car.

A January night, the train's delayed and it's dark.
The platform steps are iced over from the storm,
I hope she didn't drive to church.

No one on the streets except me and some skunks,
Who dash across the front lawn like they own it,
If they notice the lights that wait for me, they do not care,
(Zen, joke, jacks, awe).

I don't like it when I win at scrabble now, or then.
The doctor calls me at my new apartment,
We don't talk about it from across the table.

She doesn't ask me if I'm going easy on her.
When the game is done, she moves to her puzzle in the living
room,
A garden scene distracting from fall's dying colours,
This I'm not allowed to touch and I don't mind.

Emma Bider is a writer and PhD student living in Ottawa.
She is currently fixated on identifying trees in her
neighbourhood. Emma's collection of short stories
We Animals comes out in December 2020.
You can follow her on Twitter at @ebider.

2 Poems
by Priyanka Srivastava

That Home
Without Walls

What is a home?
my childhood was spent
holding this question
because the meaning
was lost somewhere.

What is a home?
I would wonder
when I would see
parents waiting
at the school entrance.

What is a home
I would muse when
I would walk back home
from the bus stop
tired and angry
holding
my hurting stomach.

What is a home?
I still wonder
when I dust the pages
and see my son reading books
lost in the warmth amidst walls.

This home of mine
whispers sometime,
“don’t you know
home is love.”

But that home without walls
which failed to hold me
haunts me still when I sleep
and that question lingers
sometime in my dreams.

The New Sita

I think of her as a woman who fought for her happiness in my poetry
She is Sita who decided not to follow her husband in my poetry.
She could have gone to the forest with him but the knots in her mind.
She decided to stay back and write her life in her poetry.
Each day a new page she weaved in the garland of her memory
Each day a new star she stitched for Ram in her eternal poetry.
Their love was different; it survived the distance and the time.
Their story was unique, that's why the world loves their poetry.
Sita stayed back and painted her dreams on canvas.
Rama came back and found himself in her poetry.
Each poem was different she had pulled in all the colours.
When they met after fourteen years, Ravana inked for them a poetry.
I know I changed Ramayana through my words in this story.
I know this, women would have loved to read this poetry.
Today a new abode will be erected for Rama in Ayodhya.
I muse where is that woman who herself became a poetry.
Keep your questions, Priyanka world won't understand them.
I muse why Rama failed to read Sita and her poetry.

Priyanka Srivastava is a writer based in Singapore.
her poems are often about her life in India and Singapore.

When she is not lost in words,
she loves to read specially non-fiction books.
She also loves to play with colours.

craggy/coil
by Ally Noyes

when the words stay stuck in your throat
what shape do they make?

are they thick and viscous
like an oil spill?

are your words ducks slick with greed
not a dove in sight?

are they springs of an old mattress
rusted and worn
waking you with familiar aches
and stabbing pain?

are they the rocky face of a blasted mountain
arching over the late California summer highway
the sky a blistering smoky orange
taunting chunks of rock
skipping
down
the
gorge
threatening the crushing weight of earth?

Ally (she/they), is a queer neurodivergent nonbinary dreamer
and schemer. They are a student of biomedical and
traditional medicine and organize with and for
their unhoused New Orleans neighbors.
When not studying, she makes jewelry, daydreams and reads.

3 Poems
by Logan Roberts

2

40 nights in the heart of a tree

nobody saw it coming

when I bloomed a bunch

of strange flowers.

They slid the body into the x-ray machine

like it was an electric halo

pangaea shifted &

from the faults came an ombré motion of angels

throwing cries of resolution like lightning bolts

at a heightened frequency

making an offer the body could not refuse.

this wound feels natural

feels evasive

like the memory of being

stuck in a long-winded parenthetical gasp

that juts out

to caress our sharp edges—

Logan Roberts is an artist and writer in Ohio. His chapbook, *It's a Knife*, is available on Amazon. Current projects are the 50/50 blog, and 1,000 Poems. He tweets @hello_im_logan

Everything's Just Fine--127

Home of a Seagull

by Zhihui Zou

A seagull does not fly deep inland,
Nor does she fly far out to sea.

She remains above the beach,
Where her world is divided into two.

But she wants to go more toward the land,
For her childhood nest was on land.

She also wants to reach where the water meets the sky,
For her friends had said that many had reached there and found
wealth.

They said that the ones there are building their nests out of
gold;
Gold awarded for their determination in flying across the
ocean.

She believes it.
But when she asks, no one wants to come with her.

“A path to success is a path of loneliness” her mother had said.
So she flies.

The journey is long, but she enjoys it.
She sees the views that, to other seagulls, are only myths—

A round rainbow, clouds that look like farmland, three suns in
the sky,
Lightning shaped in a hook, and meteor showers that last for
hours.

At night, when landing on a ship to rest, she cannot rest at all,
For it is her first time seeing ships so organized into packs.

She flies from mast to mast and bridge to bridge;
She stands on the bow and watches dolphins leaping out of the
water.

Each day she spends in the sun's halo,
Each night she baths in the Light's colorful beams.

Months later, a seaman finds her dead body on his deck.
The ship's doctor says she died due to tiredness.

She never reaches where seagulls build their nests with gold,
But her head points toward where the water meets the sky.

Zhihui Zou lives in Southern California. He has published a sports novel,
and his stories have appeared, or are forthcoming, in Short Fiction
Break and Heavy Feather Review. He is also an editor at Revolution-
ary Press. During weekends, he likes to play tennis with his friends.

Silent Clocks

by Ankita Sharma

All the clocks in my house are silent
As I observe them with curious eyes,
They melt like cold butter on hot pan
Cuckoos are inert, numbers illegible
I sit safely shut in the lockdown,
It takes me a while to gather that
Time itself has had a blackout and
Isn't contained in frames anymore
They are cracked, time has escaped
Like that chick squealing within an egg for long

But where did it go? Where do I search for it?
I can't tell dusk from dawn, they appear same
Like identical twins impersonating one another
Where else do I go find it? I stress and ponder
As though brooding over the loss of a beloved
There is no noon, twilight, night, or morning
For all days have merged into a ball of dough
Bland, insipid, flavorless and hard
Every slice appears and tastes the very same

Time isn't confined to clocks any longer,
It has leaked out and spilled all around
It's a dull blue light filled in my jaded eyes,
Or a fine dust settled on everything I touch
Or a cold damp mist choking my breath
Now, all my days & nights are soaked in it
Like a handkerchief moist with silent cries
I sit all locked-up gaping at the walls
All the clocks in my house are silent,
Bland hard slices are piled up on my plate

A writer and an artist, Ankita Sharma resides in
Faridabad, India and has authored four titles.
Her poetry has been published in the BRAG Magazine (UK),
Versification Zine, Kingzdaily (Upcoming Dec First week)
and Lakdi Ka Pul-II and III (international poetry anthology).
Her artworks have appeared on the cover pages
of a few Indian and international titles.
Her latest novel 'The Linear Tide' is available on Amazon.

Instagram- ankita.s.26
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2 Poems

by Selena Cotte

Standing at Jiráskův

I have spent years on a bridge listening to Kanye West,
waiting for a vision from my future
deciding now if I will remember any Czech or if the river below
will be enough. There's a love story down there,

one of many between me & Facebook messenger,
me & waking up at night, your time,
calling you Franz Kafka, knowing you love to read your words
back,
inflecting a slight southern lull,
ping, ping,
pinging my phone, and I thought it was all for me.

At Midway airport we met as new strangers,
prior friendship almost too feeble to sustain
an awkward gift-exchange, the look beneath the other's veil.

We were no Monica & Chandler, although for that I am grateful.

Sheepish I have learned the mistake I made then,
that no one wants to hear a love story that begins alone on a
bridge:
romance is intangible as is. Who can get off to this? Who is it
all for?

Obviously I have made mistakes, I am not a hero here,
you can tell by the way I ignored the Vltava
for a few wiggles on a screen.

But some moments are perpetual
not all of them past: I am always trying to soften my edge

yet I cannot help but confess: everything I learned in these
past four years I have always known, they are all I will ever
know,
with increasing precision & nuance.

With this pen I thee trace and another way of what I am saying:
These are the lines I finally see on your face, but you are still
beautiful. Tomorrow,
I may notice there are also spots, and gray hairs,
and an ugly streak,
but I will have always known this to be the case

and I met you at baggage claim anyway.
Tomorrow and the next day, when I am out on the bridge
praying to Yeezus, I will learn it
& more and still ping you from the runway
ready for more of the same.

My first personal poem

I admit, I cringe when I think of younger me.
She cried, she lied, she harbored deep insecurity.
Her friends were in and out the door
her time all spent splayed on the floor.

A flair for the dramatic,
she dyed her hair with Kool-Aid
or later, Manic Panic:
Plus, you couldn't trust a word she said!

Somehow, while drowning in spite,
so close to learning how to make things right,
she learned a trick she'd learned before:
she'd found the truth in the lie of a metaphor.

And so she sat down to write
a poem unlike any she'd been assigned before;
Nothing special, but it was alright,
could have done with better form

And that's when I soften
I know that girl is not forgotten;
She found her way home
when she wrote her first personal poem.

Selena Cotte is a poet, journalist & shapeshifter living in Chicago by way of Orlando. Her poems are published in journals such as Peach Mag, Columbia Poetry Review, and Taco Bell Quarterly. She can be found online @selenacotte wherever you think that may work

3 Poems

by C. M. Taylor

Another One (II)

In another one you show up under neon
lights, you burst out of a rip in time & save us
both but just for a summer: you're a wreck
& I'm trying too hard not to be & there's no room

for all that hurt. In another one I never even
move to Buffalo. In another one that first trip
for my cousin's wedding turns into a sloppy night,
kissing in the cold against dirty bricks. I'm gleeful

that you ask for my number & we text on & off &
in a year & a half when my best friend graduates,
I fly out & you pick me up & we fuck on every surface
of the house when your roommates are out.

We don't meet again in that one till a hotel bar
in New York City, a snowy night, a freak chance.
But we get a lot of freak chances: in another one
you visit Boulder when I happen to be back

& you happen into my favorite club, we walk
through the park downtown under the lights,
we smoke joints wandering my mother's neighborhood,
it's like slipping on an old favorite coat.

In this one we justify the trip: in this one my heart
is breaking all the time & I just want to see mountains.
In this one we'll wear masks on the plane. In this one the world
comes to stop after stop like a screaming, chugging train

hurdling above car traffic in downtown Chicago.
In this one I've never kissed you in downtown Chicago.
In this one I spend my cousin's anniversary
ten minutes from her wedding venue. I wake up beside you.

You're not a wreck & I'm learning, you're with me every time
& this time you got to teach me: how to stay in one place, be
still,
stop waiting to get off at the next one, off at the next one, off
at the next one. In this one we are simply here.

Yellow

I am allowing whatever light I am able to enter my body & fill me,
letting these bones sink onto carpet I haven't touched
since two summers back.

Walking into that attic, a cathedral of sunflowers,
I remember panic: how to survive such an overwhelm of yellow

& then surviving it to think: how to survive without?
Without an address that required special instructions too long

for the pizza delivery website & the time we were stoned
& didn't know
about the doorbell until it rang, blundered down the stairs giggling

& then ate & ate & ate. Here it has rained & stopped & rained
again
for hours. Here I am apathetic about therapy & here I don't believe
in EMDR,

make up numbers on a made up scale to determine
the changing weight of a memory
which never gets lighter. I am dancing & then I am falling
& then being caught.

I am asked if I want to revisit the light, the exercise we did
two sessions ago
& I do because I don't remember what it was but that it helped

& then I am picturing light. The smell of that carpet in that
apartment on Kellogg
on a day when afternoon struck the prism in the window
& I lounged on the floor

with the cat & together we bathed ourselves in rainbows.

I wasn't as happy then.

I wasn't as happy there. I miss yellow & wondering whether
I would survive

because knowing that I have & must now keep doing so
is unbearable,
this home which has finally become one mocking my
supposed progress

after therapy, psychiatry, chiropractics, more strangers invited
to diagnose
what is not me but was done unto me. It did not help as much
to bask on the floor

but it felt more beautiful. It was so good to be always able to
hide in my tower. I want
to put down the pieces & wander that street. I want to let in
only the yellow & leave the rest out.

matching pot leaf glitter pasties

in this poem I will unravel every sweater in my closet
 & try to stop biting my cuticles:
in fifty years it would be so cool to get caught sneaking
 to the bathroom
together at your retirement party, in a year it would be so cool
to still have a roof over our heads. what if, in a year, we're dead?

or what if we're riding our tandem bike in matching
 pot leaf glitter pasties,
because that sounds possible, too. you're like the part of
 the party where every buzz is new
& I got to choose the playlist (& everybody likes dancing
 to Carly Rae Jepsen as much as I do)
& we're the taste of beer, we are making out
in a stranger's laundry room, giggling & childlike & astonished
that at least right now, at least in this cut of the optimistic
 nonbinary bisexual Hallmark movie,
we have a house & a yard & a bed where we fuck off
 our makeup or
cry & cry & maybe we'll get to make optimistic nonbinary
 bisexual babies & either way,
oof, the face you make when you're looking at one of our cats.

that face I hope for draped in wrinkles. that face folded up
against your pillow
when I wake up sick in the night. I remember thinking
I didn't know you
& realizing I would always.

finally, like something picked up on the sidewalk or all the
unrealistic, unpredictable
things that absolutely happened to us both, like how
in each new city I have chosen, the moment: I walk into a
coffee shop & they know
my order (& that it isn't ever coffee) & I realize I didn't see
the familiar becoming warm
because it only took a breath & a habit
to be welcomed. it's like that. you let me make room
with everything already crammed inside your heart.

C. M. Taylor is a poet, songwriter, painter, and essayist living in Buffalo, NY. They earned their BA in Creative Writing and Dance Studies from Knox College in 2016. They serve as Art Editor for Variant Lit. More of their work can be found at Poke, Ghost City Review, and elsewhere. They're on Twitter @carma_t.

2 Poems

by Paula Ethans

quebec city, quebec

eight dollar wine stained our naïve tongues
sweat trickled down our backs like ellipses

our lips see no tricks, back down there
it was nothing more than hallucinations of love

i must have hallucinated love, nothing
could've stopped me the day they delivered you

i stopped that day, ready to be de-livered
who needs organs when you have lust

lust needed you to organize a straight face
begging you to hide your giveaway smirk

mom begged me not to give it away for boys who smirk
but i fell into your mouth and all the doors disappeared

you disappeared into the mouth of the door and i fell
while your eyes drowned out the noise

no, i's aren't selfish while you're drowning
in a puddle in the middle of a desert

break me, i beg you

my corners do not fit
into his curves
i cut him
with my edges

i have been hardened
by too many men
who called themselves my lovers

trying to lay myself
in his tender arms
is like a knife
waiting to be stroked

i am the worst kind
of sandpaper
ground down
but never soft

so
i'll let his eyes
pierce me
through my
coffin-width mirror

take a chisel
to me
chip away
at my shell
shed
my scales
expose
my skin
raw

rip me open
if he must

he just wants me to be
tender

Paula Ethans is an emerging poet, who has poems published or forthcoming in Emerge Literary Journal, Ethel Zine, The Quarantine Review, Heroin Chic, WordsFest Zine, nymphs publications, Bareknuckle Poet, and more. You can follow her on Twitter @PaulaEthans.

LJAR

by Katie Holtmeyer

spinning there in the dim light
pictures pirouetting off of half-pipes I
finally started to understand why

that was the first night
my schema was shattered

jagged pieces of cognition
lying on the floor broken
synapses bleeding out
butchering their rapport
I could almost hear my parents telling me: look
this is why we don't run around barefoot

but I'm a grown up now
no one to lift me up out of this
clean it up while I stand in the kitchen
until they tell me it's safe again
that spring night was just the end
of the beginning of so many stupid mistakes

getting tired of taking what I can get
time propelling me ahead and tossing
me back again face contorted crooked grin
numbers on the clock
like a tightrope held taught by am and pm
like the way fighting with my mom
always makes me feel like I'm twelve years old again

and yesterday I dropped my dignity
and picked up a bunch of shit with it
grocery lists of bread and oranges
reminders of renewing my license
self-referential bits and tweets I never sent
sorted through the madness
in a last-ditch attempt to find what matters

but matches made in hell
always burn up too fast

so I slapped a cast on my glass schema
and carried it down the hall to bed
it asked me for forgiveness
and I said your severed neurons need the night

and unlike George Washington I can tell a lie
but I try my best not to
I've never chopped down cherry trees
just stepped on my own schema and you see
there's no harm done there to anybody but me
I'm good at all kinds of damage

and I like to write without lies
because they have a way of
sneaking up on you and being misused
until they tie you up to electrons and beat you

and poetry is a lot like nonfiction
except none of it is true

I don't trust people
who don't have trust issues
so excuse me for asking you
to forget you ever read this
there's a messiness to broken
lines that makes me want to cry
and I sometimes wonder why we are
putting our bodies up for critique
just by existing we talked about this the other night
the flame from the citronella candle flickering
conversing about just how much there is
we are unwaveringly unsure of

and of course I look above
for answers and excuses useless
endeavors to grasp at the elusive an
abusive attempt to make the winding world level

what does it say that we bargain with God
but make a deal with the devil?

appeals burning our lips regardless
there is so much I want but never get

demons will play Russian roulette
until they catch you but
they never lurk in dungeons or grandiosity

demons only lurk in the spaces between
comfort and curiosity

Katie Holtmeyer is currently in graduate school
for English and Education at Truman State University. Her
work has been published on Pocketfire's Kindling.

2 Poems

by Rebecca Ruvinsky

water unbroken

rain wouldn't last forever
tried for / a mouthful of water / a baby
is born / you don't know the woman / it came
from / but you know these eyes / weren't we
all / once this young / except for her / she came
into this world breaking your heart / but waited
for the wrong time / to tell you /
until she was already dreaming / of a life
without you / and all the children you would
love with her / are unborn

I Put the Holes in These Walls

Your house is full of me.
It will always be full of me —
you will never be able to dust me away,
every part of me, my entire self shed
in more-than-seven years.

I coat
your walls,
I cling
to your floors,
I am seen
in sunshine

drifting in
through the wide windows
I used to dream in front of.

It was my house, first.

I regrew myself there, made myself
from the ground up, and you try to sweep me
outdoors, to lose me to the wind.

The house has skin,
too.
I watched

those layers grow,
I painted my name
on top of its bones,
I let myself touch
every surface
that is moved or unmoved,
there or not-there,
I was there, it was my
house.

I am
in its air —
you breathe me in —
I am
taking all your possessions
and making them mine,
mine.

This house will never be yours.

I made
the worn doorknobs
with the oil
of my hand,

I made
the stairs creak
with the tread
of my feet,

I made
the markings

on the closet door
with the top of my head.

I am still
in every part of that house,
the wearing and the creaks and the marks
and the air,
I'm in its air, you breathe me in,
and I know that I am there,
I am there.

Rebecca Ruvinsky is a student, poet, and emerging writer in Orlando, Florida. She has kept a streak of writing a poem every day since 2016, with work published or forthcoming in Prospectus Literary, Sylvia Magazine, Poetry on the Move, and others. She loves baking cookies, watching rocket launches, and listening to music too loud. She can be found at @writeruvinsky.

Third Person Cigarette

by Kenneth Johnson

Once rebuked,
he referred to himself in third person
If only he had listened
If only he had tried a bit harder,
if only he had turned this way
instead of that way
he might have made something
of his life
He's going to light a cigarette now
Doc said it's not worth killing yourself
but it steadies his nerves
He remembers a joke about a father
who left home to buy a pack of cigarettes
He never ever came back

Kenneth Johnson is a visual artist, writer, and educator born in New Orleans. Currently living and creating in southern California. Kenneth published infrequently during the last decade, but he has recently been focused on writing and publishing poetry. Kenneth has had a poem published (online) twice, in *Written Tales* and *Beir Bua Journal*.

"Virginia Never Learns To Tell Time"

by Anisha Kaul

The concept of time perpetually disturbed her
She never fathomed those awful time zones
How crazy is it! One might travel miles
Away and yet not advance in time
When she sit to breakfast
Far away someone might sit to dine
The regular – past, present and future
She mischievously stirs in her cold coffee
Childhood and old age woven together, dusted
With freckles of random coming of age instances
Reflecting the charms of a self-taught somebody
Non-conformist, experimental and modernist
Breakdown of chronology, time and self
It was but a stream of consciousness
Into which she walked towards the
End, her spiral hallucinations of
Unending miseries undone at
Touch, shifting perspectives
A day in Mrs. Dalloway's
Mundane life, and Time
Passes, Between the
Acts, she allows
Herself to
Drown

Anisha Kaul is a poet with a Masters in English Literature, presently living in New Delhi, India. Her work is forthcoming or has appeared in The Indian Feminist Review, Kingz Daily, Dwelling Literary, The Minison Project, Beir Bua Journal, Small Leaf Press, Analogies & Allegories Literary Magazine, and Visual Verse, among others. You can reach out to her on twitter @anishakaul9.

Asynchronicity

by Jason de Koff

I awoke and was 884 years old,
left to myself in cryogenic sleep,
forgotten in a ship transport to Mars,
found only upon its decommission.

Losing all but my life,
I was part of the background,
an anomaly,
the olden day circus show freak.

The language was the same,
but with new meanings,
and nuances,
difficult landmarks to discern.

Captivated and scared,
by the new sights to behold,
I had no shared story,
with humanity's sea.

Once I was smart,
but could not now comprehend,
though alive,
I was really dead.

Jason de Koff is an associate professor of agronomy and soil science at Tennessee State University. He lives in Nashville, TN with his wife, Jaclyn, and his two daughters, Tegan and Maizie. He has published in a number of scientific journals, and has over 50 poems published or forthcoming in literary journals this year.

Twitter: @JasonPdK3

Thirty Years

by David Hay

In the deep-tide light a child born beyond the limits
Of his parent's love, discovers his flesh and unifies
It with the fields that feel as inseparable as his hair,
Still free from the hairdresser's conformity.
Trapped in the routine of his parent's arguments
He relinquishes his body to the clouds, numerous,
Ticking across the vision inducing sky, imprisoning joy
In a desperate silence.
Comforting his mother, crying, relieving herself of
Each second of unhappiness with every tear,
Holding her hand and turning forever inwards;
Dark corridors of guilt, of denying his father any comfort.
Rushing to her, behind her shut bedroom door,
Sitting on one of two single beds to be told
About the cruelty of love' diminishing returns,
Of a bitterness growing unbearable.
And now with the death of two grandparents,
Two grey-haired conservatively dressed Aldi shoppers
Who gave the boy an illusion of security,
Of a deep Permanence. He finds himself stranded in loneliness.

He looks in the mirror, seeing only his father;
The blotched red anger of his father's sadness,
After the same argument with his girlfriend he has had for four
years,
Ending in the same emptiness. He finally knows his lonely pain.
His parent's deaths are constantly on the edge of his thoughts,
As well as another war, another financial crash, a burning
planet.
He imagines bringing a child into this world of slapstick politi-
cians,
And is terrified into a bewildered numbness.
His girlfriend in her twilight suicide is losing her interior con-
flicts,
Collapsing inwards like a dying star,
And the boy now irredeemably a man counts the hours
Until he can go back to sleep and forget he exists.

David Hay is an English Teacher in the Northwest of England.
He has written poetry and prose since the age of 18 when he
discovered Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* and the poetry of
John Keats. These and other artists encouraged him to
seek his own poetic voice. He has currently been accepted
for publication in *Dreich*, *Abridged*, *Acumen*, *The Honest Ulsterman*,
The Dawntreader, *Versification*, *The Babel Tower Notice Board*,
The Stone of Madness Press, *The Fortnightly Review*,
Nine Muses Poetry, *Green Ink Poetry*, *Dodging the Rain*,
The Morning Star as well as *The New River Press 2020 Anthology*.

"The Shadow of A Cross"

by Yuu Ikeda

When the sun rises at the top of the sky,
the window casts a shadow of a cross

I am alive,
breathing in and exhaling guilt
So, I must shoulder the shadow of a cross

Breath of invisible guilt
eats away at me,
and the shadow becomes deeper

Although the sun sets,
the shadow of a cross is carved in the night eternally,
as an afterimage

Yuu Ikeda is a Japan based poet.
Her published poems are
"Sinful Silhouette" in <Rigorous>,
"Broken Pieces of the Truth" in <Briefly Zine>,
"A Flickering Light" in <Kalonopia>,
and 3 sonnets in <The Minison Project>.
And she writes poetry on her website.
<https://love-poem.amebaownd.com/>

Time, of course, is relative.

Yet time can also pass far too quickly.

*The aging man laments the rapid speed
at which his youth became his dotage.*

*Laughter-filled summer evenings with friends are
seemingly over before they've truly started.*

*And time stops.
The pain and angst of trauma freezes us.*

*Young lovers find the sweet serenity of a first kiss
halts time and space,
leaving only them in the moment.*

Ultimately, everything is fine.



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