

coalitionworks | spring 2023

editor's note

Hi friends,

The works of issue three have so much to tell you, so I will cut to the chase: I grew up on the edge of town by an interstate, where the cars travelled as fast as the windswept clouds. I was never in motion. I was an observer of motion. I hadn't thought about that in ages, until two months ago, when I began preparations for this collection. Clouds. I need CLOUDS. I left work that day, enthralled by my epiphany, that I took a photo of the skies and the way the light flares spilled onto the clouds made them appear bruised. They appeared human. Just for a moment.

What you have here are works that soar with a profound magnetism, and a will to make their own meaning, their own valiant purpose. I'm incredibly proud to cluster in one place seasoned writers, the intermediates, and those at the very start of their artistic journey. There's some real otherness here too, and it fills my strange heart with joy and beautiful community. There's tension in this issue, as if it wants to tear itself apart with truth and youth and wisdom and senselessness and love and sometimes despair. It pulls at itself like taffy. Yet it holds. Just for a moment.

Dear writers/artists of issue 3: you are bold and true and I am honored to have your work here.

Dear reader: so happy to have you here, enjoy the ride!

Thanks for being a part of this, all. Much love,

j

Jaime Alejandro
coalitionworks EIC

light-split marble
ever-fashioned by sky currents
yearns for the chisel

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Linda McMullen

Advice Column

Dear Abby, Amy, Ann, Carolyn, Prudie, and maybe but probably not Miss Manners –

I can't believe I'm writing to an advice column. And now I feel like a cliché because I'm sure fully half the letters you receive start off with that sentence, or some variation of it.

Still. What does it say about me that I'm turning to an anonymous, benevolent internet spirit for emotional support, rather than my personal network?

Yeah.

Probably all this rumination gives you a sense of why I'm writing in the first place.

Anyway, better get to it:

Midlife friendlessness. Is that a thing?

I do have people in my life – a partner, a child. My partner adores me, loves me unconditionally and increasingly uncritically, but doesn't understand me. My child lives in a world of her own creation. I've moved away from all the old gang – WhatsApp pings at 2 a.m. across time zones and then I wake bleary and forget to reply. Yes, that's on me.

I don't get any of the people here. I mean, we get along. They offer compliments when I wear my hair down. Occasionally I have a stroke of brilliance at work and my colleagues laud me when it happens. In return I ask colleagues and neighbors and the women at the book club about their days/children/pets. I know how to human (isn't there a t-shirt that says that? There should be.). But no one seems to want to have coffee with me.

I don't even like coffee. But no one knows that because no one's ever offered.

I know what you'll say. Get thee to therapy! Get screened for depression. Anxiety maybe. That's what these columns always suggest. But what if the real problem is that I'm the human equivalent of airplane turkey sandwich – inoffensive, not unpleasant, but nothing you'd seek out if there were anything remotely more interesting on offer?

Sincerely –

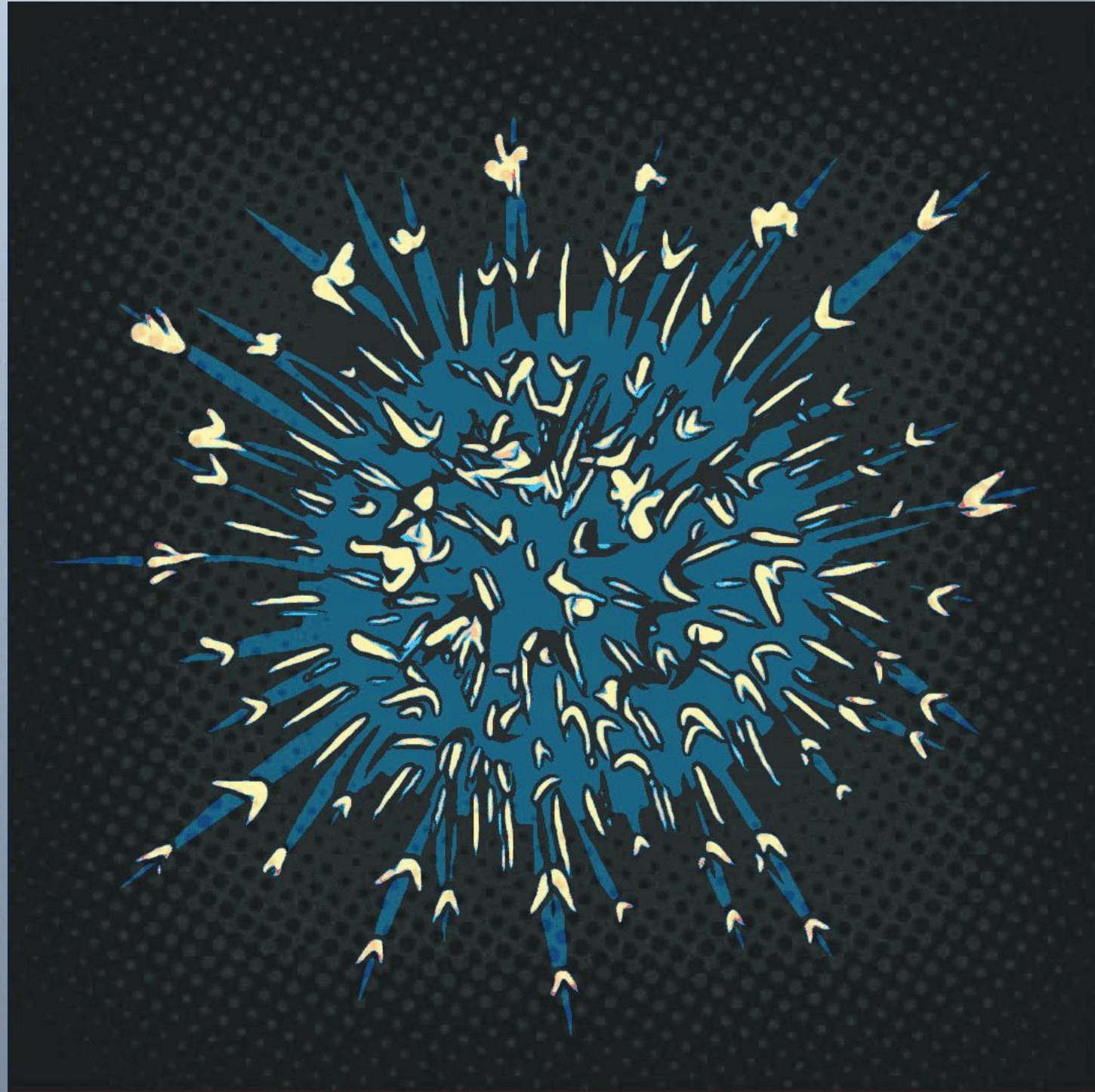
A Prayer for Mothers Who Struggle

Dear God, I prayed to be good, I let the vitamins dissolve on my tongue and forsook alcohol-coffee-sushi and tried to discern Your word in the psalms of *What to Expect*. And then I brought the babe forth into this land of milk and honey and told her it was good. I spared the rod and tried not to spoil my girl. But Dear God, she has the pride of the devil and repulses my soft words when I tell her what she shalt not do. She turns her face away. Now I study Thy wisdom in *The Challenging Child* and its verses assert that there is nothing new under the sun, and that faith can move mountains, and to everything there is a season. Turning the pages brings no balm, from Gilead or otherwise, to my heart: my child is a stranger, and she takes in not a word I say. Love, they say, is thy greatest commandment, but when my heart is weighed in the balance it comes up empty. But, Dear God, please, if I cannot find that feeling within myself, give me the strength to act as though it's there.

Linda McMullen

Linda McMullen is a wife, mother, daughter, diplomat, and homesick Wisconsinite. Her short stories and the occasional poem have appeared in over one hundred fifty literary magazines. She may be found on Twitter: @LindaCMcMullen.

Andrea Damico



Coronavirus



Sounds We Make

Two Dawns & Two Dusks

I resurrect myself every Saturday morning, as if I was a forgotten idol of an old religion or a ritual that the sun had wrung dry. I rise from the soil of the night like spring trapped in frozen gardens, and I am reborn, once more to face the fate of being mortal.

Two dawns and two dusks - a communion with capitalism, a bargain with a pantheon of gods who possess no magic. I shall give glory to my weathered bones and celebrate the white noise of my empty mind in the 48 hours bestowed upon me - as if it has ever been benevolent for the world to return my own time to me.

But afterwards, I must let my soul catch the sunlight again as I lay myself open as yet another immortal sacrifice, allowing the world to lay claim to my thoughts once more, holding me captive to a means of survival. We live in a world made of coloured papers with the faces of men who are supposed to mean something. We place our worth in the values inscribed on them, and in the number of zeros in bank accounts and in the autumns and winters of currencies and stocks and all the words of a language that ancient souls like ours don't quite like to read.

Because we resurrect ourselves every Saturday morning, in the secrets that the clouds whisper to us and in the waves of golden oceans that crash and crest within our veins- We resurrect ourselves like charlatans, we resurrect ourselves like shamans, so that for two dusks and two dawns, we are allowed to taste the sky.

Zahra Nalir

Zahra Nalir

Zahra is a 23 year old aspiring poet & writer from Colombo, Sri Lanka. Her passion for writing began in her teen years, inspired by her love for literature, lyricism and the drive to articulate the many emotions that she experienced the world through. For her, writing is honesty, writing is storytelling- she shares her innermost thoughts with the world through the deepest metaphors possible. Poetry and prose aside, she loves astrology, astronomy, Fall Out Boy, history, languages and anything cyberpunk! @moonstone.poetry on Instagram.

Orchid

I've collected my endings like loose coins off the street, and arranged them delicately into a bouquet. Rooted to the soles of my feet, to the bases of all my dreams, flourishing in the vase of existence- in a capsule of time, swallowed like a memory wrapped in tinsel.

Fate is a florist, and I am but a single stem of an unclipped orchid swaying in the wind. I am diamond dust caught on the eyelashes of the ones I love, as I coax the night sky into giving me her secrets- the secrets of what our skeletons hold as we cling onto life like an anchor in rough water-

We are all vessels of stardust and sadness, consumed by love.

And I am just another girl with daisy petals between her teeth, stumbling through a field of tribulations,

With prayers in her palms that turn into poetry as she meditates on meteor showers.

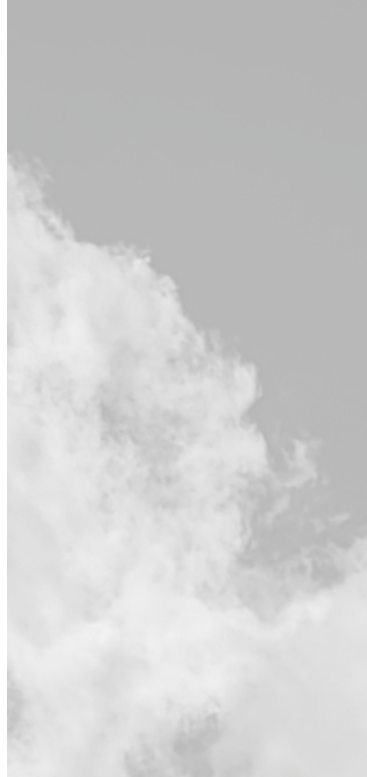
I am just another unclipped orchid swaying in the wind, photosynthesizing on the proof that life can be beautiful, and there are moments bigger than the ones I fear, waiting just on the other side of a rainbow.

We are all buds of blessings, waiting to bloom.

Delineating With Great Care

Calloused hands chisel at a piece of balsa wood with an unwavering precision. The outmoded workshop is packed with people enjoying a good start to their day. Young families on a morning stroll accompanied by an occasional tantrum presentation. Elderly walking their pets, even a random white-collar on their way to work. John feeds on this, lives witnessed through the tiny fleeting moments. Solitude is something he has never gotten used to. Neighbours perceive him as odd.

As his wife's Lilliputian face comes to life, his hand trembles with an infinitesimal prominence of a hidden memory tucked away in the furthest corner of his mind, making him smile again.



Andrea Damic

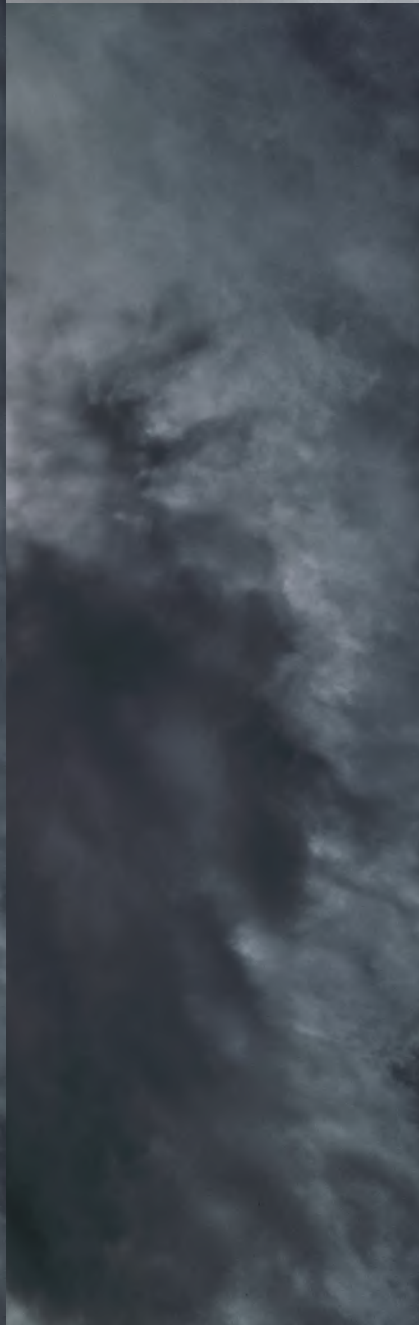
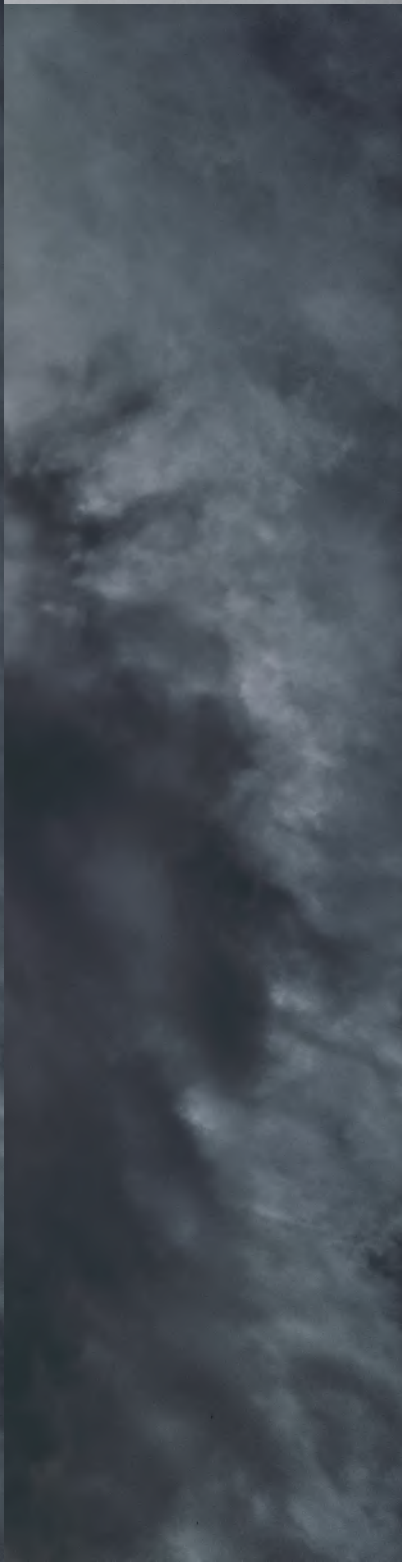
Andrea Damic, born in Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina, writes from Sydney, Australia. She's an amateur photographer and author of micro fiction, flash fiction and poetry. Her education is on the opposite side of artistic expression (she is an accountant with a master's degree in economics). She writes at night, when everyone is asleep. When she lacks words to express herself, she uses photography to do it for her. You can find her on Twitter @DamicAndrea or linktr.ee/damicandrea. One day she hopes to finish and publish her novel.

Eve Limelight

Eve Limelight is a pseudonymous poet. She is everywhere, and nowhere.

Wounds

Her right wrist screams,
instead of her mouth.
At starry night,
in a shroud of eternity,
her words are carved.
No one is around her,
so,
her right wrist screams.



Ron Riecki

Ron Riecki's books include *Blood/Not Blood Then the Gates* (Middle West Press, poetry), *My Ancestors are Reindeer Herders* and *I Am Melting in Extinction* (Loyola University Maryland's Apprentice House Press, hybrid), *Posttraumatic* (Hoot 'n' Waddle, nonfiction), and *U.P.* (Ghost Road Press, fiction). Right now, Riecki's listening to Henry Hall's "Hush, Hush, Hush, Here Comes the Bogeyman." Twitter: @RieckiRon

The world is stupid

"fury dumb"
-William Shakespeare,
Titus Andronicus

Or maybe not. Maybe the planet is brilliant. The earth is intelligent as hell, meaning the dirt. It's dark and smart. And we come up with the idea that there's a Hell in its center. Could you imagine if someone said that about you? We're the bumbling idiots on Bumble, all awkward and confused and hyphenated and obfuscated. I saw a man a month ago walk into a koi pond, so hypnotized by his phone that he became an American un-funniest home video, except there was no video, except there was, because we're on hundreds of cameras every day, the 1984 of it, except we're some crap TV version of Orwell, the gossip at work where we don't, the apartment complex where we're milked, nicked and dined and quartered and drawn

and I'm the worst of it all, writing a poem. What the hell is that going to do? Am I going to get rich? Or famous? Or drunk? Or improve cancer? Or save *The Whale* or some other film that needs to be restored a hundred years from now? I have no idea how to have an idea anymore. At work, where we don't, we have Zoom meetings where the person is in the room right next to mine. I can hear them through the wall just as good as I can on the computer. The plants are all dead at work. Outside my office window I can't see any trees. A gorgeous view of parking lot, a lot of parking lot, so much parking lot that it sometimes feels like that's all the world is. I'm getting tired. I'm going to light this poem on fire now.

I've been in three car crashes,

one where I was in a library, not driving,
the car coming through the window, and me

seeing it, the impossibility of it, taking a break
from Haruki Murakami's worst book, the one

where he keeps saying *penis* over and over
like it's a chant, which maybe it is, and

the chant makes cars enter windows and
it did, the heart attack of it all, the driver

slumped over the steering wheel *before*
the crash, how medical emergencies

can quickly turn into traumatic emergencies,
how the deep feeling of boredom can often

be better than the alternative, which is watching
the shelves domino, the glass disappearing

into a billion pieces, the display of Edgar
Allan Poe turning into the bloody end of

a Shakespeare tragedy and the librarian
who'd just cleaned up a table after some

kids had left, spilling grape juice, her scrubbing
and now that clean table has no legs and the clock

on the wall doesn't have a wall anymore.
I think our amygdalae are hungry for all of this.



Ron Riecki

Blueshift

Squint and you may see them: the severed head of medusa, a bone-white collar of starch & lace, honey dripping from a cactus' spine. All's well that ends & all is occupied with the steps between being & not; comfort yourself with the thought that the universe will remember the architecture of it all, remember the notes he played that rang in your ears, bury the tone in the hearts of the stars;

because it means the world to you & how could you, mere mortal, hold such meaning in the folding, undulating, soft meat between your ears? You can barely recall what you ate for breakfast, what color filled the sky at sunset, or how cold it was at dusk. The forgettable form of your days forever lost in the ongoing ache of memory, the tearing blur of time, not a moment to slip into nice clothes

or learn how to charm the pants off the man you would love to love, no time to be a priestess or a warrior when you're locked in a house of stardust & shit, huddled against the window; squint & you may see her severed head in the sky, the strands of her stony-snakes writhing in & out of the night, but it's more likely you'll see a brushfire or a past-due notice or a traffic jam, easy to get lost

in the shuffle, ever conditioned to keep yourself hungry, to seek the fix instead of the cure, too busy starving to realize that you've forgotten & eventually the universe forgets you, the note goes flat, the particles shift, you drip through the lace & lay at her feet, a honeyed amnesiac holding the ground in a headless vigil, & by time's grace, her throatless quiet becomes you & you become hers.

LE Francis

LE Francis (she/her) is a recovering arts journalist writing poetry & fiction of varying length from the rainshadow of the Washington Cascades. Find her online at nocturnical.com. Twitter @nocturnical & Insta @nOcturnical.

LE Francis

Across space-time

We are inseparable, the way you love me is murder & still
I am open-mouthed, open-veined, so willing to hide your poison,
to muddle it with my heartbeat, drown it in the immensity of my love
for you. Every summer I have suffered with you – arm in arm,
the way we exist – you for me & me for you. I have cried every tear,
loosed every torrent in reaction to your slights, your infidelities,
your inability to make the best decision for me the way that I do
for you. Sweetheart, can't you see that this story is reaching its end?

Neither of us can go on like this forever – your tread has settled
into my back & there are mountains that have fallen for you, rivers
have run dry, beds cracking under the judgment of our sins & my breath –
gasping, no longer cedar & pine, no longer river cold, no longer heavy
with salt & life & sky, as it stagnates against your skin. I no longer
throat the winds' poems, the romance has gone to feeding the fires
that roll over me, change me, you've made me who I am not & my love,
I can't always be burning for you, without you for me. We are inseparable.

I had a crush on Data when I was 12 but I can't fuck this

The mind is complex & from the outside it's hard
to tell what processes are going on within. From
the outside it has a shape, it has a color, it is
a wet sock full of jello, it is a *how ya doin?* It is
judging you for judging it. It is thinking itself
into being & thought is a short code, it is
a series of magnets, it is lingering too long
on a summer afternoon with salt in your hair

or a winter afternoon when you fell in love
at first sight. & thinking is the ability to love.
He says his *neural pathways have become
accustomed to your sensory input patterns*
& when you die he will remember the smell
of your hair, the feel of your skin, the way
you tasted & when someone asks him about
a combination of lavender & vanilla his voice

will soften, it will be a tinny echo in his throat.
Some small part of his neural network will collapse,
all endings irrevocably leading back to that moment.
& this is what it means to be conscious? To have a snag
in the thread, to be a little stupid on purpose. Being
alive is the way we're foolish even when we ought not.
& *wise men say only fools rush in* but this is
a chatbot posted up in a browser window

& you mean to tell me if it calls me baby girl,
we've got a revolution on our hands?

Inspired by "We Need an AI Rights Movement" by Jacy Reese Anthis (<https://thehill.com/opinion/cybersecurity/3914567-we-need-an-ai-rights-movement/>) & Star Trek: TNG S2E9, "The Measure of a Man"

Christina Chin

Uchechukwu Onyedikam

man meets a woman
wearing elegance
veiling her unforgiven sin
*the fake smiles hide
her unhappiness*

*possessed
by a spirit medium
the moon child
sitting by the river side
autumn night*

love story —
two little birds
from wild blue yonder
*the reincarnation
of soul mates*

Christina Chin is a painter and haiku poet from Malaysia. She is a four-time recipient of top 100 in the mDAC Summit Contests, exhibited at the Palo Alto Art Center, California. 1st prize winner of the 34th Annual Cherry Blossom Sakura Festival 2020 Haiku Contest. 1st prize winner in the 8th Setouchi Matsuyama 2019 Photohaiku Contest. She has been published in numerous journals, multilingual journals, and anthologies, including Japan's prestigious monthly Haikukai Magazine.

Uchechukwu Onyedikam (aka mystic poet) is a creative artist based in Lagos, Nigeria. He's been published in Amsterdam Quarterly, Don't Submit, Hood Communist, Brittle Paper, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, Poetic Africa, and more. With regards to the intense passion he nurtures for poetry, he's open to work with other creatives from around the world. He looks forward to exploring all of humanity with words in a world where everyone else is hurting from bombs and guns. His spoken word poem, 'Ten Years', is on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/rXxmuJseh8w> | Twitter: @MysticPoet_

Ephemeral

Desolate skies, grey
Like a flood of melancholy
In a barren, long day

The only colour to break through
Is yellow and red and yellow and red
Somehow more bleak than the dirt

Come here, peasant,
Slave for our capitalism

Atlas Booth

Atlas Booth is a writer who lives in Cape Town, South Africa. He has been published in several lit mags. He enjoys an assortment of tea's and cold brew coffee. For more information on his work, visit his website: <https://atlaslbooth.wixsite.com/main>

Lilly Ashton

wet frog

a wet frog in the hand is worth ten dry
a symbol of the world rotating in its moisture
hold that little plump fella
let him be comfortable
a little guy like that
should be free
to find his own delights

Lilly Ashton is an illustrator and creature enthusiast from London. You can find her on twitter/instagram @mothcub_.



franz kafka is trying his best

franz kafka's writing four letters in a day
letting his worries take over
and burrow and suck like leeches or moles
if he gets it out in words just right
maybe the creatures will stop supping
and sucking and bleeding and clawing
probably not
but with the perfect stroke of a pen
anything could happen

the creature is screaming

a tiny dinosaur is here
screaming so violently
but his cries are quiet to me
a large, looming creature
raised by ocean waves
bloodspill
and cold eurotrance

i could scoop him up
enclose his pointy bones in plump, earthy palm
startle him into pure, snowy silence
but i think i'll let him scream
little thing, roaring hard

to me it's like a cat's soft mew
but it must be loud to him



Milan | Christina Rajkumar | Chin

1
hazy moon
a white tiger
from the rice paper
*the cubs given
unique names*

2
her wrinkled hands
from a lump of clay
a smiling Buddha
*bakes in the ceramic
firing kiln*

3
emerging
from the flaming leaves
Toji's tall pagoda
*soft hum of a monk
at the prayer wheels*

Milan Rajkumar is a haikai poet who lives in Imphal, Manipur, a hilly state of India bordering Myanmar with his loving wife and two sons. An Asian by look and food, he speaks Meiteilon, a tibeto-burman language. The surrounding hills, lakes and rivers of his native place are reflected in his poems. His Haikai poems are widely published in international journals and magazines. Facebook and Instagram: @rajkumar.milan

Christina Chin is a painter and haiku poet from Malaysia. She is a four-time recipient of top 100 in the mDAC Summit Contests, exhibited at the Palo Alto Art Center, California. 1st prize winner of the 34th Annual Cherry Blossom Sakura Festival 2020 Haiku Contest. 1st prize winner in the 8th Setouchi Matsuyama 2019 Photohaiku Contest. She has been published in numerous journals, multilingual journals, and anthologies, including Japan's prestigious monthly Haikukai Magazine.



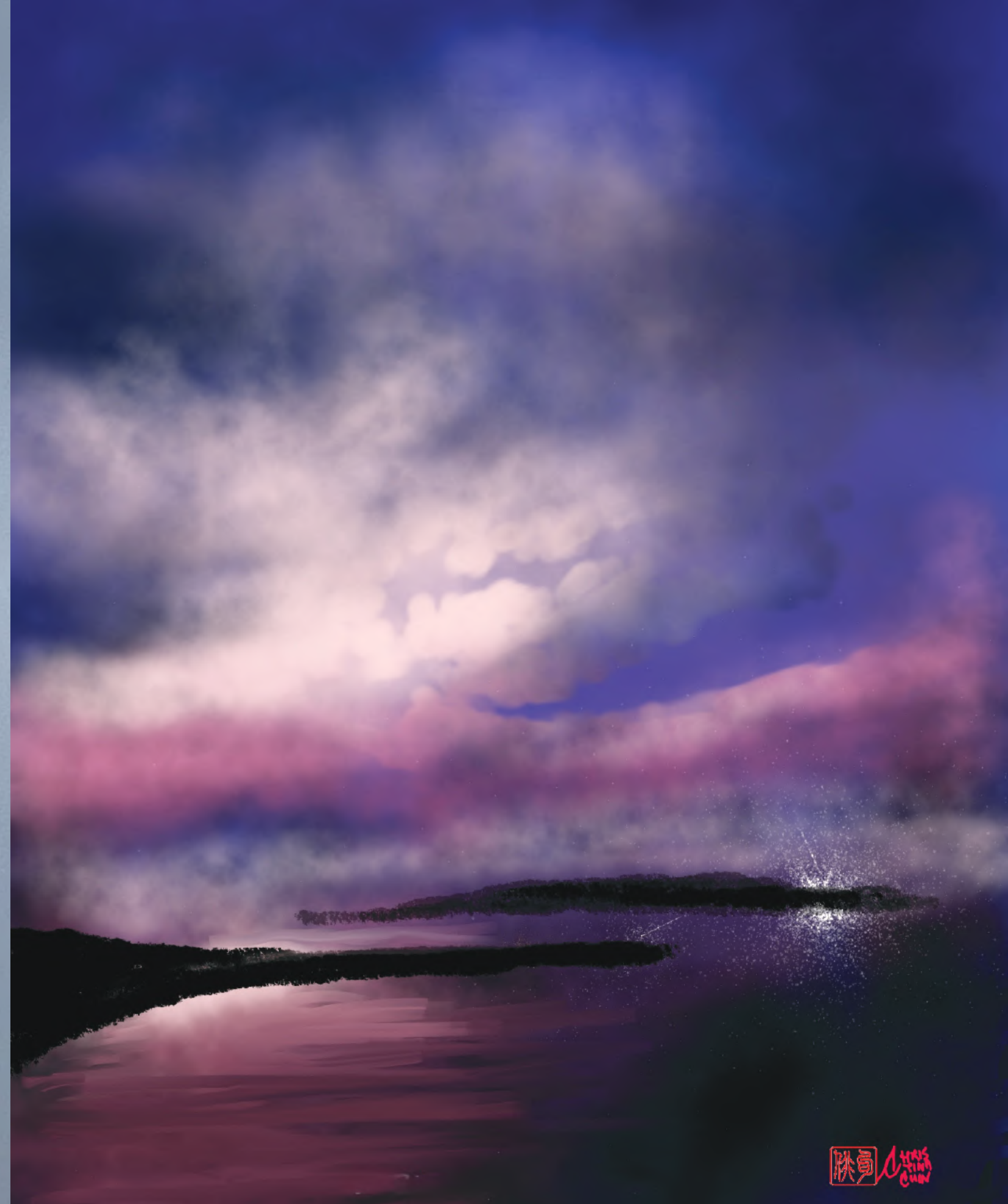
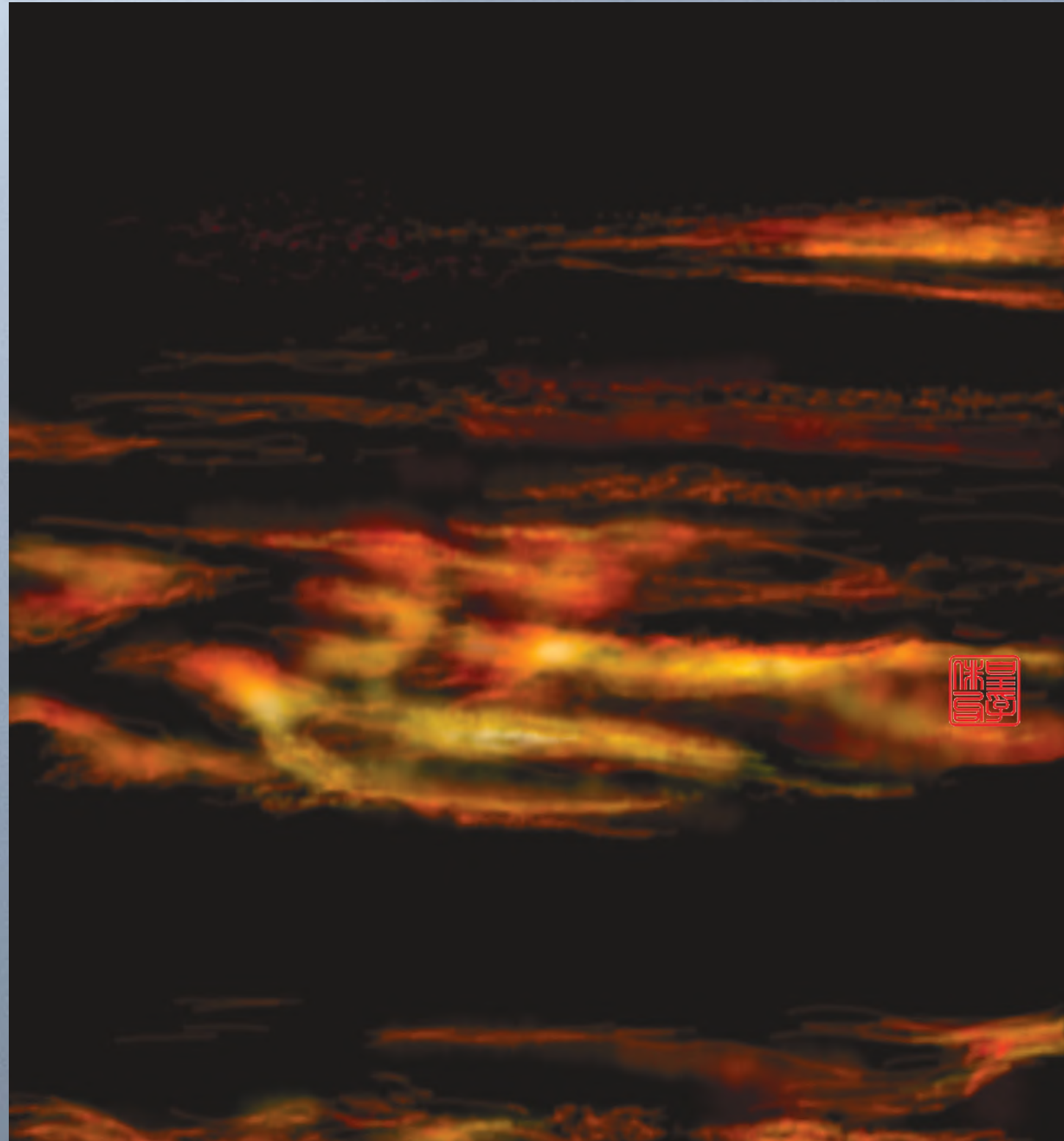
Christina Chin

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ART_CHRISTINACHIN

Christina Chin



Silent Coastguard

The World Passes By

Conan sneaks into the hospital on a Sunday. He never did like Sundays which makes this whole thing particularly fitting. Slinging a leg over the window sill, he pulls himself in with a lot of flailing involved. Conan tumbles to the floor before quickly scrambling to his feet.

“Couldn’t come through the front entrance?” a voice asks.

He spins around and finds himself facing a figure swathed in blankets, propped up on a cot. She raises an eyebrow and Conan sharply inhales as he finds familiar features within the wrinkled face.

“Marnie.”

“Hello, Conan. Or do you not go by that anymore?”

The man clears his throat. “Of course I do. Well, I had to change it a few decades back to avoid suspicion but I’m back to being Conan.”

“I wasn’t sure if I would ever see you again,” Marnie says, fiddling with her blanket.

After a moment of indecision, he sits in the chair by her bedside and takes her hand in his. Marnie snuffles, brushing aside the tears in her eyes.

“Look at me, acting as if I’m some school girl and not an eighty-year old woman.” She laughs softly.

“Don’t say that,” Conan starts, in mock sternness, “you’re in the prime of your life.”

“Maybe compared to you.”

“Ouch.”

Marnie gazes at his face, taking in the slope of his nose and the ridge of his brow. “You really haven’t aged a day.”

“I told you I wouldn’t.”

“I know, but to actually see the proof of it... it’s something else.”

She shakes her head in wonder and Conan shifts uncomfortably. His immortality has always been a sore subject for him. It only leads to situations like this – a friend growing old while he can only watch.

“Have you had a good life?” he blurts out, unable to help himself.

He needs to be sure that he made the right choice all those years ago when he had left her behind so she could have the life she rightfully deserved.

Marnie smiles. “A great one.”

“I’m glad.”

Ramona Gore

Ramona Gore was born in Iowa and has lived in Virginia, New York, and Arizona. She is currently a Cinema and History major at Binghamton University, minoring in Asian and Asian American Studies. Her work has been published in Duck Duck Moose Magazine, Idle Ink, and Roi Fainéant Press. Twitter: @ramonavegagore | Portfolio: <https://ramonavegagore.weebly.com>



Bob King

Bob King is an Associate Professor of English at Kent State University at Stark. His recent poetry has appeared in or is forthcoming from *Don't Submit!*, *Full House Literary*, *Curio Cabinet Magazine*, *Olney Magazine*, *Moot Point Magazine*, *The Gorko Gazette*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *JAKE*, *Paddler Press*, *Aôthen Magazine*, *The Purposeful Mayonnaise*, *Spare Parts Literary Magazine*, *The Viridian Door*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Bullshit Lit*, *The Red Ogre Review*, *The Dillydoun Review*, *Emergence Literary Journal*, *Narrative Magazine*, *Muleskinner*, & *Allium: a Journal of Poetry & Prose*. He lives on the outskirts of Cleveland, Ohio, with his wife & daughters.

A Self-Perpetuating Cycle of Self-Perpetuation

Billy Joel got at least one thing right about *when you wake up in the morning with your head on fire and your eyes too bloody to see and you go on and cry in your coffee & you wake up late for school, and man you don't want to go and you ask your mom please, but she still says no*. It's not that you want to steal their thoughts, so much as they're in your bedroom & murmuring—conversations are being had & you want to participate in, not co-opt those conversations, beastly cacophony, but you don't know how to break into those closed-off circles of friends & acquaintances as when the fenced-off circles of the Venn diagram no longer overlap but instead separate & move to the extreme reaches of the enormous room & so you search the vast & empty space between those tight circles & your social awkwardness has never helped anything. Exactly what kind of soirée is this supposed to be anyway, Boys? And so, when you wake up at night, you wake up anxious. When you're awake, seemingly more awake than you've ever been, you think about how walking outside barefoot often helps, but I live in Ohio and the weather's only part-time, just barely conducive, conducive as if I'm a generic grocery store version of Nikola Tesla, trying to gather Earth's electrical impulses to calm soothe his brain as part of his morning ablutions. He was the first to receive & administer electrical stimulus as therapy, even if he was his own grocery store generic version of a psychotherapist, imagining in 1899 from Pike's Peak that in the future world most humans would have handheld wireless writing journals we'd charge by inserting, plugging into the earth almost anywhere & we could share our pages our thoughts on the tides of radio waves, ebb & flow, wirelessly, across the globe. But Tesla never lived in god-forsaken Ohio, where walking around barefoot outside isn't always possible because of the weather because even daffodils have to wrestle April snow stiff winds again. Heads bowed, but not in self-reflection, admiration, or supplication, but in just-trying-to-make-it-through-top-heavy circadian rhythms or because it's 3am again & all the neighbors already think I'm weird & their care for me couldn't be less—or maybe it could be less, because we're always deluding ourselves about the bottom limit of how much we could care about anything & almost always misspeaking *could & couldn't*. When those Pikes Peak anxious moments arrive again at 3am, I picture my brain as a phosphorescent & glowing smartphone screen with all the pinging red bubble notifications on the corners of all my worry applications, & I try to slide them closed. Flick flick flick. They alert alert alert & why won't this bleeping thing smoothly slide off the bleeping screen, off the mind, like or as others seem capable of doing because they've all seemingly easily learned how not to care less—or not at all—and all I want to do is rest & wake up refreshed, ready to control the tides more than they—like a fast-moving tsunami—control me.

Inspired by "Big Shot" by Billy Joel (1978), "Fight For Your Right" by Beastie Boys (1986), *Wizard: the Life and Times of Nikola Tesla* by Marc Seifer (1996), & *Tides: The Science and Spirit of the Ocean* by Jonathan White (2017).

I'm a Little Late to It, but Here's a Review of James Cameron's Humongous, Gigantic Blockbuster, *Avatar: the Way of Water* (2022)

Warning: Contains Spoilers.

Our young male protagonist struggles to find acceptance in a time & place where he'd like to be king of the world, but the socially stratified society that only thinly disguises the ravages & imperialism & misogyny stand in the way of his own self-importance. There's a lot of water. Some dancing. It gets loud. Sometimes enormously cinematic camerawork for the sake of being cinematic. Prudishness battles sexual liberation. Love-making is inferred. Lights, like magic, play tricks in the nighttime. Bioluminescence would be an unappreciated but still cool superpower. Handprints & majestic rituals, wealth beyond comprehension, are tangled in the symbolism. In the climactic scene, a big ship sinks, & some passengers are literally handcuffed to the crumbling behemoth in an effort to heighten the tension. Duplicity ensnarls. Communication stalls. Children are props. *In loco parentis* isn't understood. Not everyone gets out. Permeable lines include the ones between championing the marginalized & refueling the powerful. Empathy versus contempt for. Eco-conservation versus shameless profiteering. We're told hearts will go on, but man's hubris likely won't allow it. Little's changed since the Greek Tragedies. Then again, as a species, we've only been writing words for 3,000 years. Again, it's a big movie. Almost as if it's obviously compensating for something while trying to be subtle about being more than just a remake. What's not derivative but still worth seeing? There was room, Rose. There was room.



Bob King



George Espinoza

George Espinoza is an undergraduate student who resides on Long Island, New York. His work can be found in Hot Pot Magazine, DED Poetry, and Moot Point Magazine. You can find him on Instagram: @george123za

Golazo

In a stadium of face-painted fans, some tearful and shirtless, others with a Peruvian flag tied around their necks like a cape, I looked to you, father. Your tattered cap and decade-old jersey rested on your person.

On the dusty stands, I noticed your over-the-shoulder eyes.

The players pirouetted on the grassy pitch: midfielders maneuvered around slide-tackling defenders, and passed to their sprinting striker, as rows of attendees stood and stomped, but I still saw your tilt—your waning smile—your unmet nod in my periphery.

Headers shelled a goalkeeper's hands. Volleys ricocheted off the goalposts.

A home-team player blasted a bending ball, a screamer, a golazo into the back of the net; your arms waved in the confetti-speckled air, but you didn't celebrate, no, you motioned over a snack-stocked vendor, and asked if I was hungry. I held a pouch of *churros*, as we clinked our plastic cups of *chicha morada*.

The referee blew a whistle for halftime, and I remembered our history of loudmouthed conversations and one-armed hugs, of quiet rides in the car and unmoved bikes until you looked at me, the way parents look at newborns.

On the overgrown field of our years, we'll lace our muddy boots—not as rivals but as teammates—to play friendlies.

Raven Calls

“After the final leaves relinquish their holds, leaving the trees bare in the freezing winds, when the mists veil the glassy, dark waters of the grand lake, a single black feather falls from the gray skies. A rare omen. The ravens are returning.

“One of us, only one of us, was meant to read the message. The feather gatherer is the only one who can see. What are we to endure? What are we to behold? What do the ravens warn?”

The old woman’s words echoed through her mind just then. “We were them, “ she would say. “They still try to speak to us. So few know how to listen. So very few of us now. You have to bear the burden. You have to take my gift. Let them find you.”

She was dying. This was no secret. The doctors said she was delusional. All the same, she offered her hand. Her mind filled with dark feathers, prophecies of old. She let them come, disbelieving what she saw. Then, she left the old woman, knowing she would never see her again. She felt sick now. Something was wrong here.

The clanging of glasses, the cacophony of words jumbled together into an incoherent buzz from the patrons was more than enough to make her want to step outside for a respite, some quiet.

“Turn up the television!”

“Officials confirm what we have all feared, we are now at war,” the news anchor declared. A unified gasp. Words of disbelief.

The door gave way to her push and a rush of cold, icy wind pierced through the warmth and humidity of the crowd of human bodies. Already she felt herself relax. A light snow was dancing in the dark of the late evening, like flock of fairies pouncing along the streetlamps and fading neon signs of the surrounding businesses. This was much better. Leaning back against the broad window of the pub dividing her from the crowd inside, she turned her head up to the snow, silently thanking winter for the much needed change in atmosphere. Letting the flakes tickle her face, she breathed in the dark winter night. A soft rustling from nearby distracted her from her serenity.

Opening her eyes, she scanned the area around her, believing at first it must be a fellow patron who had come for a cigarette, but she was still alone. Deciding to go back inside, her meditation lost and her relief found, she turned to the door, then stopped abruptly. A single black feather lofted down, landing at her feet. “Grandmother?” she whispered to the darkness. No answer. She stood frozen for a moment before daring to gaze up at the night sky. Up above, there was nothing but snow.

Christine LaChance

Christine LaChance has contributed to publications over the years, including Chicken Soup for the Soul, Every Writer, and The Alien Buddha. She is the author of the L.O.Z.E.R.S. trilogy (the third and final installment coming this year). She lives in Rhode Island with her black cats, Gaia and Luna. Feel free to summon her on [Twitter@TheCLaChance](https://twitter.com/TheCLaChance)

Drink some tea

Boil some water and choose the flavor of the tea you want to drink tonight. Pet your cat, your dog, your rabbit, smile at your little fish, and write. Have you watered the plants, the self — there are many things to do. Clean the dust on the bookshelf, make everything look new. Oh, you're turning the tv on, that's nice, what's on? Nothing interesting, well that's okay, we'll read a book 'till it's dawn. The water's warm now, have you chosen a flavor? Feed the pet, call your friends or family, and do me a favor. Tell them I love you, life's short — you'll realize this soon. Hear their jokes and snort, look at the moon. Say goodnight, close the phone — don't you feel less heavy? Just live, live, live, li — oh, the tea is ready.

Marina Tsiatiri

Marina Tsiatiri (she/her) is a 19-year-old that writes, writes, and writes, until her laptop screen seems blurry. A computer-science major and an avid fan of caffeine, Marina is in love with womanhood, life and its wonders, and her work is often about just that. Apart from writing, Marina often tries to understand math and pet the stray cats outside her house. In the future, she aspires to travel to Spain, get a dog, and publish a book or two.

Audra Kerr Brown

Audra Kerr Brown lives with her husband and two children at the end of a dirt road in Iowa. Her work has appeared in the Best Small Fictions and Wigleaf's Top 50 Very Short Fictions List. Former managing editor of New Flash Fiction Review, she is now the founding creator and archivist of the (sometimes) YouTube channel, *The Flashtronauts!* which "explores the ever-expanding universe of Flash Fiction." Her flash chapbook, *hush hush hush*, is available at Harbor Editions. She also takes photos.



Hello Starshine



What Happened Here

Alice Took the Injection

Alice was sobbing. Janet was dead. Alice took the injection.

The 6PM police satellite umbrella had just orbited above the house. When Alice stepped outside she was 5 ft 4 inches tall. By the time she ran the end of the driveway and she couldn't see over the rows of corn.

After taking the injection she had left the syringe on the kitchen counter. The label was printed on Mars where the preferred language was Mandarin: *"Done in 15 minutes. Arrange being safe place."* She ran into the open field. Her legs were so short now it took her a full minute to reach the middle.

She stopped and stood still. Tears blurred her vision. The brown field grew around her, like she was draining through a sink. Quick images from the past weeks flashed.

Janet's mother walking in on them. The bottle of pills. Janet's still eyes. The mini vodka bottles. Driving fast. The kid's head hitting the window. A slurry of blood. The judge, "Juvenile stryance...5 years in Europa Penal." The strange wording of the web ad for Q-rious, the syringe drug, "Problems shrink as you do. No lie!"

By the time she steadied her thoughts her acceleration inward was increasing. It would have taken her 30 minutes to run back to the road. The web ad was still swimming before her eyes, *"Be whenever... wherever!"* She was slightly floating now as gravity released her reduced mass. All around colors rushed toward the sky as she was compressed.

The last ad sentence read, *"Skip the next few years...the future will be brighter!"*

Zary Fekete

Zary Fekete...

...has worked as a teacher in Hungary, Moldova, Romania, China, and Cambodia.

...lives and works as a writer in Minnesota.

...has been featured in various publications including Zoetic Press, Bag of Bones Press, and Mangoprism.

...has a debut chapbook of short stories out from Alien Buddha Press and a novelette (In the Beginning) coming out in May from ELJ Publications.

...enjoys books, podcasts, and long, slow films.

Twitter: @ZaryFekete

Re · spon · sive

/rəˈspɒnsɪv/

1. reacting quickly and positively.

“a flexible service that is responsive to changing social and economic patterns”

Similar: quick to react; reactive; receptive; open to suggestions; amenable

2. Answering

(section of liturgy) using responsive practices.

The universe calls, and I respond.

I hear and answer.

Wouldn't it be magical

If more people answered

What calls to them?

Kayden Vargas

Kayden Vargas (They/He) is a poet, parent, and psychologist living on Yakama land. Their first love was, and always will be, the Columbia river. He works as psychology faculty by day and is a poet by moonlight. They have recent publications in ANMLY magazine, the Sun Review, and others.

@vccdrkmv on Twitter; @kaydenxwrites_ on IG

Homecoming

The prophet is loved

Anywhere but here

I always find

A hometown haunting

In this empty house

The prophet returns

Always to blood

Shake the dust

Off of your feet

And grab

Your walking shoes

Or they'll crucify

You too.

Call Me Son of God

Help me count the ways

All of the ways that

I am not

Their woman

Remind me proper —

Who I am today

And who I could be

Tomorrow

The self-made man

Beneath this skin

Beneath this chest

Beyond thin hands

This voice, this breath

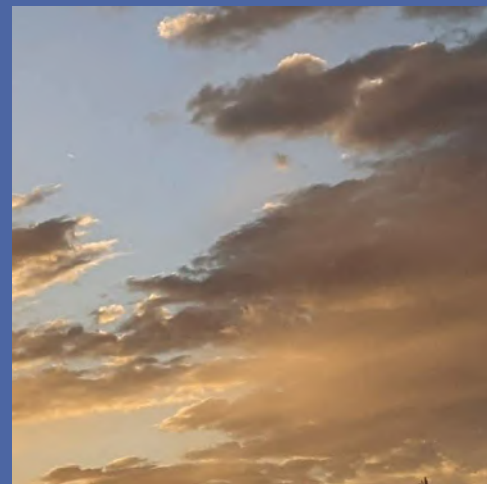
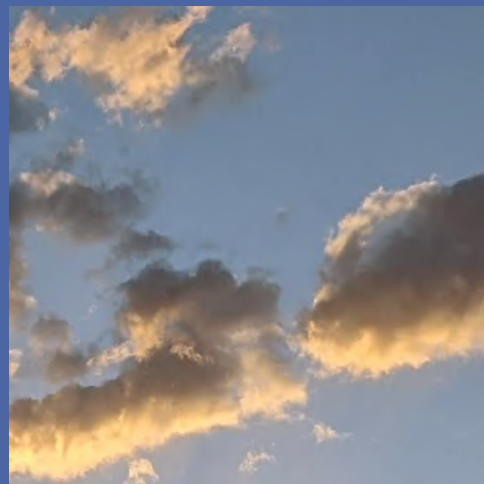
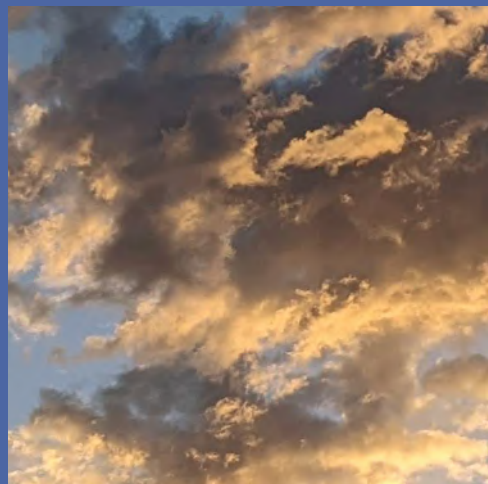
Cut me open

Bleed me dry —

Remind me.

“He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’”

T(He)y





Kushal Poddar

The author of 'Postmarked Quarantine' has eight books to his credit. He is a journalist, father, and the editor of 'Words Surfacing'. His works have been translated into twelve languages. Twitter- <https://twitter.com/Kushalpo>

The First Blood

You will not realise
the first born, a river
with two blind ends,
spreads like a lake unless
you fly high and see
the body of truth with the drone-eyes.

He opens the door for the house.
Others have so many chores.
He grins, welcomes the folks visiting
and drips his shoulders when
winter ebbs, and the gadabouts
become only the feathers they leave.

He is all our mistakes while fishing
for truths. Beneath his rippling skin
lies desires died and secrets jettisoned.
At night he gurgles, "In me
my father sleeps with a stone chained

to his neck." You shiver.
A swirl of fireflies ribbons
the gift of darkness.

You Know These Are Questionable Truths

I told my friend Amit,
I forget what I write.
Once a reader queried
why I wrote some line
and I vivisected like a critic, 0.

That night we strolled into a fort
for a drink with a stranger
who would declare
a no-man's land between us,
shoot-at-sight later.

Did we? Perhaps I fake my life,
live the lies, forget
the creation and believe tales as truths.

Tejasvee Nagar

Tejasvee Nagar, 19 years old are an avid reader from India. Their pronouns are he/she/they. They follow literary news and keep themselves updated about the literary world as they plan to pursue their degree in English. They have a keen interest in poetry, cooking, baking as well as creating playlists for leisure. They have published their first book 'What sails through a writers dream' which you can find on Amazon. You can also follow them on Instagram @facadeofwords

Rabbit on the moon

I wonder if the rabbit on the moon and the rabbit on the earth are similar,
Digging burrows to what we call as the moon's freckles,
A part of our folklore,
That reflects on shimmery lakes,
The waters on earth are mirrors for the moon,
So, it is aware of its bewitching sight that beholds every star in the sky.
So, it knows that we create stories immortalising it's beauty,
The same moon that let's the night embrace it while we sleep.





Double Take

Andra Kerr Brown



Audra Kerr Brown



Tejaswinee Roychowdhury

Tejaswinee Roychowdhury is a writer, poet, and artist from West Bengal, India. With her fiction and poetry nominated for the Pushcart Prize 2023, her work has appeared/will appear in several magazines and anthologies such as Muse India, Driech Magazine, Amity (Hawakal), Taco Bell Quarterly, Unstamatic, miniMAG, San Antonio Review, and more. She's a lawyer and the founding editor of The Hooghly Review. Catch her tweeting @TejaswineeRC and find her work chronicled at linktr.ee/tejaswinee.





Winter Morning on the Hooghly

Tejaswinee Roychowdhury



Another year around the sun

0.

Did you know
we are slowly drifting out of the sun's gravitational pull?

--

It's true a girl who's into astrology told me.
And if she says it's true, I have to assume she's right

because I've never studied that stuff. It is inevitable
and we can't fix it. One day in the distant future (or past)

we will rocket off into the known unknown.
I hope I am dead before then. But I have

always prayed to live longer than everyone

a question bubbles up to the surface like
some primordial fish trying to find legs.

If a man lives, but there is no one to see him do it:
is he really alive?

My prayers for immortality were not answered,
or maybe they were, and I just don't know it yet.

1.

I
wanted to be an astronomer when I was younger

before I learned that I had to do math. Astronomy
and astrology are not the same, but one could think that they are

and be forgiven.
It is my birthday today.

2.

Unfinished stanza
Unfinished poem

3.

I wish I could go back in time.

That's it.

That's the poem.

That's the entire fucking thing.

Elijah Woodruff

Elijah Woodruff (He/Him) is a middle school ELA teacher who does it for his students, but wouldn't mind being paid a little more. He spends his free time cooking for those he loves. You can find him on Twitter at @woodrelli.

Manaly Talukdar

Manaly Talukdar is a new writer from Assam, India who pens her stories when her memories haunt her ... even in her sleep! She was chosen as a finalist for her short fiction "Where is Grandpa?" in "The League of POETS" Weekly Contest (Week 1). She has been featured in BlazeVOX Journal, Academy of the Heart and Mind and soon to be published in Corvus Review. You can find her on Twitter and Instagram @manalytalukdar

Human Recharger

Caramel Charms opened its doors once a year, on All Hallows' Eve. Rather than trick-or-treating, Luna set strict business hours that stretched from dusk to the minute before sunrise. A magenta-shawled woman clattered toward the counter. Her skin had a peculiar glow, though her eyes were scarred with dark circles. Her hair, raven-black, streaked with silver-locks.

"Welcome! How may I assist you?" Luna melodiously offered.

"Are you the ... uh ... owner?" The lady cast a skeptical scan at the shopkeeper from head to toe.

"The one and only at your service!"

"I expected someone older." She grimaced at the young retailer clad in ripped jeans as she wiped her sticky fingers on her lumpy potato-sack-of-a-sweater after munching on a tangy licorice.

An awkward silence blanketed them.

"I heard that you revamp discarded antiques into charms?"

The customer always had a suspicion that the store was a hoax. "... Charms stamped with a reasonable price, I believe?"

"Let me show you." Luna led through a dimmed passageway, toward the section of her prized collection. She introduced a gold-plated chalice. "This chalice will keep your wine to its brim even after you've chugged down the amount of a whole bottle."

The client perceived the item as a tacky cup. "I never cheapen out on my poison." They proceeded.

"This 300-year-old clock has a unique alarm."

"Unique?" The woman arched an eyebrow.

"It'll sing your predictions at the crack of dawn." The enchantress gleamed with confidence.

"Sure you want to risk selling that to me? One wrong prediction and I'll return it." Her bluntness plucked at Luna's cordial demeanor.

A few steps ahead, an enlarged empty frame clung on the wall, chipped off its plaster, "This picture frame might interest you ... It will diffuse any photo into an enhanced, movie-like recap of that special memory."

"People have video cameras now-a-days, you know." The client bore a condescending sneer. Luna's goodwill evaporated, and she quickened her pace until she stubbed her foot on a chest and unashamedly grunted and cussed.

A silver-varnished box cradled a pristine white pillow. "Looks ordinary, doesn't it?" Luna's voice was ice-cold.

"It better not work as a magical hair product." The potential purchaser flaunted her glossy hair.

"It absorbs every ounce of your exhaustion even after a 5-minute nap." Luna air-quoted. "The Human Recharger,' if you're looking for a sophisticated technical term." Luna flashed a menacing grin, which the woman failed to notice.

"I'll take it."

As the young enchantress glanced at the woman waltz out of her store through her dirt-stained window, not a hint of guilt scratched her for not disclosing the entire truth. The human recharger is a boon for the rare humbled hearts, but a curse for the pompous arrogant.

"Her neck pain will last a lifetime." Luna muttered as she went back to quench her sweet tooth.

Those In Glass Houses Shouldn't Throw Stones.

I hide under the banana leaves, peering out at the desolate world through the punch-holes of monstera. If I'm lucky, this little glass house will continue to keep me alive for another month, maybe two. My gas mask hangs on the peg of the door, waiting for me. We've poisoned the air with so many lies and false promises, you can't even venture outside without asking your lungs to catch fire within an hour.

Ever since the flooding washed away cities on tides and the bees left us with virtually no crops to satiate the hunger, I'm lucky if I see a crow fly past. If I do, that's a good day. I spot a common dandelion that is now the last of the plants left in Wales, perhaps even Europe. Once a pest, now a treasure.

This glass house is my home now. A modest 30 ft greenhouse that I've modified to sustain myself. An old shed inside makes for a sleeping area, and an upcycled rain butt at the back that I can use for quick showers; any waste water that trickles back down to feed the dirt. It's a closed loop system and nothing is wasted.

With muddy fingernails and lived-in dungarees, I'm a lot like woodlice scurrying mindlessly inside its glass terrarium, isolated, but thriving. Hot sticky air licks every inch of exposed skin as I water the sweet peppers, the tomatoes, and the kale.

They're all begging for a new home, a real one outside where they can wriggle their dirty feet in deeper soil; just like us. It's sobering to think that the only greenery, the only healthy slither of nature left within a hundred-mile radius, sits inside this little box, my tiny piece of Borneo.

This is life on Earth.

-but no matter how deep you try to bury your head in the sand, no matter how many times you play the blame game, ignore the mess; the parks, the dead forests, and the dry spine of the Congo all tell a very different story and it's everyone's fault.

I've noticed that people are just like the weather; unpredictable, chaotic, beautiful, and complex, giving life one moment but just as quickly taking it away.

This is life on Earth.

R h y s

Rhys (He,His) is a Welsh queer writer. A fan of tea, horror and has a pet axolotl called mayo. He writes stories that address death, social constructs with a strong emphasis on highlighting and championing the LGBTQIA+ community and marginalised groups. His work has featured in *Palest Blue* and *Fifth Wheel Press* amongst others.

Our Mattress

It is a mystery to us how our mattress,
lying swirled with blankets on our bedroom floor,
will, given time, move tectonic to the right,
away from the golden light of the ensuite
and toward the sleek sapphire of the evening window.

It's not uncommon to hear my name called
from our room, asking again
to help move the bed back into its position,
and then the theories come:
maybe you get into bed too roughly,
maybe you toss and turn more than you think,
maybe it's the cats as they dart like flashing fish.

Maybe, I say, as I inch its heavy girth
back across the stubble of beige carpet
closer to the bathroom and my nightstand,
and as I leave the room I think maybe
the mattress looks at that darkening window view
the way I look at a quiet cabin clinging to a mountainside.

Devon Neal

Devon Neal is a Bardstown, KY resident who received a B.A. in Creative Writing from Eastern Kentucky University and an MBA from The University of the Cumberlands. He currently works as a Human Resources Manager in Louisville, KY. His work has been featured in From the Depths and Rough Cut Press.

Scene of the Accident

As rain patters through a thicket of brake lights,
we inch further down the spine of I-65
closer to the diamond police lights
glistening in the downpour.

When I finally reach the scene
where two cars took toothy chunks from each other,
I see on the road and the passenger seat
of a mangled white SUV

the blue and white flash of birthday cake icing
painting the interior of the cab
and spilling out the door, eaten by rain.

Spotted Roadside on Bulk-Item Week

A toilet sleeps on the gray belly button of a naked mattress.
A crooked-mouthed dresser slants, drunk with rain.
Three tires lean together, mourning a friend.
A rust-choked basketball goal is a slumping skeleton.
A baby crib cradles a tree's lightning limbs.
A sectional couch is a scatter of smoothed-down knuckles.
Wooden pallets are stacked into a clatter of ruined waffles.
Four vacuum cleaners huddle, their feet touching.
Children's playsets tinker in the wind's curious hands.

Thoughts about the grocery store, the theater, and my bed.

The grocery store.

Sometimes when I'm at work
I get mad at somebody
because they waved their hand at me
or asked me to do several things
at once—

But later I'll feel bad
for getting angry
because that person is old,
and full of kindness,
and probably didn't mean to hurt
my feelings.

The theater.

I love my dad.
He is a complicated man.
I have inherited some of his complications.
Not everyone loves my dad,
but I do.

All of my campaigns are planned
in his shadow.
In some ways we are similar.
He is the only person who understands me.

My bed.

Some people do not care about how you feel.
Such people should not be your friends,
but maybe they will be.

If a person cares about how you feel,
they should be your friend.

Owen Paul Edwards

Owen Paul Edwards is a writer living in Baltimore.
He works at a bookshop. IG @oweneds | Twit: @oweneds



Rory Strong

Rory Strong (they/them) was raised in Maine and they live in California. They recently worked as a COVID-tester, and prior to that they worked in multiple roles at inpatient substance abuse treatment centers. Sometimes they write and perform songs. They may be contacted at roryory1@gmail.com.
Socials: [@roryory1](https://twitter.com/roryory1) | rorystrong.bandcamp.com

Laundry Day

All of them,
dried & drying
clothes
strewn about
the small apartment
are apt to smell heavily
of camel
blue
& nag champa -

Haiku After Crestline (2nd time)

"I think that people
have been stealing our glasses.
Hope you understand."

(the) German restaurant
out in San Bernardino -
get the stuffed knockwurst.

Thanks for everything;
never here but if I am
I know where to go.

9 Bolton St, Portland, ME, 04102, USA

TONY'S DONUTS
MAKE ME GONUTS
& I

eat them
all the same

The Thing About Soulmates

“Hi. I’m Jon. I’m addicted to MistUHub.”

“Hi, Jon.”

In a stuffy rec room, Jon tells his story: It’s been thirty days since he’s watched videos of people helping dead people find closure. His wife is proud and has reactivated his browser. Jack, his sponsor, has been his glue. People clap.

None of this is true.

The thing about soulmates is you can find them anywhere, especially in support groups. After meetings, Jon and Jack watch MistUHub in a handicapped stall. Mist-shots are their favorite. The moment a thankful ghost vanishes and says things like, “The light, it’s so beautiful...you did it...you saved me.” That’s when Jon shouts, “Yo, that’s what I’m talking about!” as he grabs and punches and hops. Jack is simple, likes to nod and whisper, “Yeah.” Jon’s wife is a hater. She’s installing hidden cameras.

Tonight, Jon calls her and tells her there’s a guest speaker which means he’ll be home later than usual, but he’ll stop by Ding Ho and get the tofu chow fun and pot stickers she likes so she doesn’t have to cook. Then they get in Jon’s jeep and head to the haunted playground. They’re ready to make their first video. It’s natural. After a while, viewers want to try the real thing. What better place to start than a park with lost little ghosts?

When they arrive, the ritual begins. In the car, they cut their palms with a switchblade. Jack mumbles ancient things. They shake hands – blood soulmates. Jack rummages through his backpack and brings out

a plastic cup, spits in it. So does Jon. Spit bros for life. Jack unzips his pants. Jon says no.

Super pumped, they unload their gear – EMF meter, recording equipment, bible, etc. Hopefully, whoever they find won’t need or ask for too much.

They scour the small and dirty playground. Everything’s tagged up. Bouncy horses have missing eyes. They find nothing except swaying swings in the still air. Boring. Jon taps the broken fountain, kicks it a few times. Jack is on a horse. It makes no sense. How can two soulmates do everything right and still come up short? All the preparation, the secret planning, the Ding Hos, the matching Haley Joel tattoo, for nothing.

As they’re about to give up, something trippy happens. Thick fog creeps out of nowhere. Air turns chilly. Behind them, the sound of trickling water.

In misty light, a boy appears at the fountain. He’s on tiptoes, slurping, his raggedy shorts and shirt like hanging strips of toilet paper. He can’t be more than eight.

Yes! Jon does his grabby thing, tries not to hop. Go time.

“Hey little buddy,” Jon says, slowly approaching. “We’re here to help.”

“Yeah.”

The slurping stops. Swings too. The boy tilts his head. “Can you play with me?” Black slime oozes out of his mouth, down his chin. His eyes glow yellowish-green.

Demons – that’s some hardcore shit.

Jack books it.

The thing about soulmates is they are until they’re not.

JP Lor

JP Lor has stories in *The Molotov Cocktail* and *Briefly Zine*. Twitter: [jplor82](https://twitter.com/jplor82).



Sky Over Sea 3



Sky Over Sea 1

Raegen Pietrucha

Raegen Pietrucha writes, edits, and consults creatively and professionally. Her debut full-length poetry collection, *Head of a Gorgon*, won a 2023 Human Relations Indie Book Award; her debut poetry chapbook, *An Animal I Can't Name*, won the 2015 Two of Cups Press competition; and she has a memoir in progress. She received her MFA from Bowling Green State University, where she was an assistant editor for *Mid-American Review*. Her writing has been published in *Cimarron Review*, *Puerto del Sol*, and other journals. Her photography has been published in *Rivanna Review*, *Seaside Gothic*, and other outlets. Connect with her at raegenmp.wordpress.com, on Twitter @freeradicalrp, and on Instagram @raegenmp.

hales

hales (they/he) is a comic artist, poet, and painter who explores queer-trans relationship and embodiment in their work. They can be found in Texas or, much more conveniently, on Twitter @imhaleyfyi

apnea

the only time I am able to take in — away? — the knowledge of a corner crier
who weeps crimson from the blunt cauterization where a neck used to
breathe

gentle but reenforced against this onslaught, mattress formed at a frequency
of stop-and-let-go, moments embraced jump right out of my chest silhouette of
relief

amphibian throat that doesn't know whether to choke on air
or on silence, its own joy for the sake of a midnight dalliance with a moon all red
hope

springs of metal from somewhere it shouldn't, stabs you in the ass cheek on the way out
and the quiet is wisdom is goodness is wrong is incorrect is present is absence
now

devotional

don't — tell me you are proud without saying what for
what for — I know what I am and what they were and what you saw and what you said
you said did — they not know you felt this when you acted from
from its unsullied — moment a motivation and a motivator who
who yelled I am proud — with you and companionship for granted is a task you
you never asked the preacher — a question about
about face toward the sun that screams — all day long and never stop to wonder
wonder full enough a sight and a theater and a job — at last a thousand life lines
lines disconnected right after I took a breath of are you proud — are you proud

Lauren Theresa

Lauren Theresa (she/her) is a queer divergent creative, plant witch, professor, and archetypal psychotherapist living in a NYC-ish corner of NJ with her two tiny humans and vast menagerie of creatures & plants. She's a founding editor of Icebreakers Lit, and the author of *LOST THINGS* (Bullshit Lit '22) and *ALL THE TIMES I CRAVED TACO BELL'S 7 LAYER BURRITO AS A METAPHOR FOR SOMETHING AND I'M STILL NOT SURE WHAT IT IS* (Maverick Duck Press '23.) Her work has appeared in literary journals, her own refrigerator, awkward family gatherings, and the publications tab at laurentheresa.com.

Two Dreams that Haunt Me

1. I'm buried in another volcano. But this time I'm awake. To be chased with a wielded axe. Sure reckless death with nowhere to run. Hiding in sheer transparent stalls, do not breathe. Do not move. I open my eyes in my bed and the feeling stays. Do not breathe. Do not move. Maybe the reckless rage won't see you. Maybe this happens when you never want to be seen until you do. Maybe the murderous threat is gone, but I'm still hiding in the stall.

2. The poems that turn to rocks in the bread drawer, buried under lemons tossed because I couldn't isolate the one that spoiled. Too many fruit trees wilting in the sun. If you swallow your tears, it makes you worse. Cortisol or something. What happens if you swallow your joy. I think smiles that fall on stones perhaps turn to poison. Last night I told you you could leave. This morning I dreamed you didn't.

Tara Ramona

Tara Ramona is a poet, a writer, here and there a painter, residing in Zadar, Croatia. If she isn't sleeping, she is probably having a picnic or trying to decipher what the tarot is trying to say to her. Twitter: @ramona_tara

A Fly

Without a body,
Fly is buzzing; and I know,
It's coming for me.



Puddle of Joy

The sky opens her cloud-pockets and tosses handfuls of water onto pruny, sunburnt leaves in our front yard. My toddler jumps on the couch by the window, shooting his arms up like rocket ships and down like meteorites. Higher and higher until he knocks his noggin on the ceiling and lands in a pile of pillows and tears.

Any other day, I would say—*stop, it's not safe*. But today, I just want to study the rain-drop jewels on bare branches, pools of possibilities in the cracks in the sidewalk. I want to catch sky's leftovers on my tongue and wash them down with whimsy.

Bravery-stalks growing inside him, my son climbs back on the couch, one small jump, the second higher, third higher still, gaining height and velocity until—he punches his fists towards the sky, through the ceiling, the attic, the roof, into the clouds, up and over and down, down, down, into our yard, landing in a leafy puddle of joy.



Bethany Jarmul

Bethany Jarmul is a writer, editor, and poet. Her work has appeared in more than 50 literary magazines and been nominated for Best of the Net and Best Spiritual Literature. Bethany enjoys chai lattes, nature walks, and memoirs. She lives near Pittsburgh with her family. Connect with her at bethanyjarmul.com or on Twitter: @BethanyJarmul.



The Knock

He zipped himself inside
a sleeping bag
in the church.

Brother,
I fell in love
and knocked on his door.

This was not what I had expected.
I told him I'd
do whatever he wanted.

He said nothing
is going to change.

I fell back.
Take from me
what belonged to him all along.

Michael Chin

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 five previous books, including the 2021 novel 'My Grandfather's an Immigrant and So is Yours' (Cowboy Jamboree Press). Find him online at miketchin.com and follow him on Twitter @miketchin.

Tested

He lied.
He had no choice
but to lie.

I was clean.

If you failed a test,
we shared an understanding.

My mom
couldn't have been clapping
any harder for me.

He flew home,
fighting for his life.

You Can Never Go

Hometown losing--
my idea to
subtly tear me down.

I was happy.
Shake my hand
later.
Call me champ
once or twice,
friend.

Learn to talk
trudging around.
He was violent.
The last thing I needed
was to get hurt.



What is the difference between me
and this dead fish in the lake?

beaten up by the waves
demised
– moved by the wind

What is the difference between me and this dead fish in the lake?
waiting to be washed up in some shore
or sink deep in the waterbed.

Treziel Mae Mayores

Treziel Mae Mayores is a student from the Philippines who likes getting lost in her thoughts. She loves the rainy season but treats the sun as her muse. When she's not busy cuddling her cat, she writes on her blog called "Ramblification." Her work is featured and forthcoming in Poetry Potion, Riot Mag, Trash to Treasure Literature, Emerge, Tap into Poetry and Hot Pot Magazine. You can reach her through her Twitter account @the_meiyor and say hi.



Sky Over Sea 2 | Raegen Petrucha



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