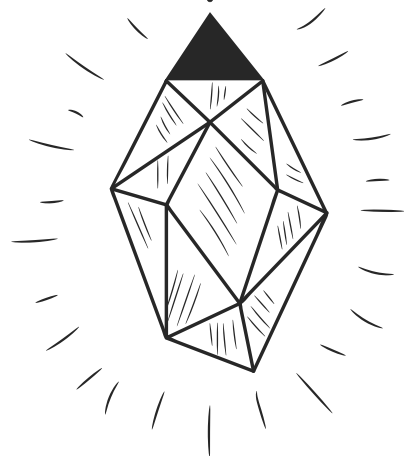
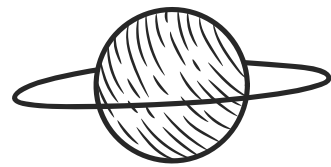


ISSUE VII:
TAHMINA
love & loss



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EDITOR'S NOTE

Free Verse Revolution's biggest issue of 2022 is here - boasting over 70 pages of poetry, prose and artwork for our readers to enjoy, take inspiration from and hopefully return to in the future. We often hear about our print issues becoming 'coffee table books' and we love this. Our issues are edited to be read in their entirety but the calibre of work included also means they lend themselves to the casual dip in and out too.

Tahmina, a female character from the Persian epic *Shahnameh*, breathes life into Issue VII as her story reminds us all of the great tumult of both love and loss. Her story begins as she seduces Rostam (Rustam) becomes his wife and bears him a son. Rostam, a great warrior, ever on the move, cannot stay and so Tahmina ensures their son, Sohrab, wears a jewel, to ensure Rostam can identify him should their paths ever cross. Tahmina acts out of love and swiftly falls into loss, as the moment Rostam recognises Sohrab's jewel is the moment after Rostam defeats and kills his own son on the battlefield.

The contributors of this issue take you on a similar journey: we begin with lust, temptation and seduction, we find love, heartache and soon we move into remembrance of those we have lost and the grief we carry.

When reading, please be mindful of the following content warnings:

pg. 28; suicidal ideation

pg. 46: pregnancy loss/early miscarriage

pg. 48: abortion

pg. 50: post-natal depression

Your humbled editor, always,

Kristiana

FREE VERSE REVOLUTION

Free Verse Revolution is an international literary and arts magazine publishing quarterly issues in print and digital format. Each issue is themed and shares poetry, prose, photography and artwork by creators from around the globe. Free Verse Revolution also publishes an annual print anthology sharing a selection of pieces from the four issues of that year. We pride ourselves as a home for new and established creators since we began publishing poetry as an online WordPress platform in 2018.

Read previous issues online at
www.freeverserevolution.com



TEMPTRESS

EMILY MEW

after Elif Shafak

*Adam and Eve shared a tender, ripe, deliciously
alluring, aromatic fig, splitting it open right down
the middle.....as for the apple, I am sorry, it didn't
even feature. (Elif Shafak, The Island of Missing Trees)*

Swathed in green, my limbs sway slowly -
languid with heat. Claspng honeyed fruit,
I cast rippling shade onto parched ground.

This pair of tangled vines
sprawled beneath my boughs.
How could they be anything but drawn to me?
I offer them shelter without hesitation.

Temptation. Sin. Downfall.
Strange words, dreamed up in some other land.

I grow in a language of tenderness:
of gentle rain soft on my leaves, dripping to my roots;
of sun's golden breath warm against my bark -
I pull its abundant magic through me,
weave it into sweetness filled with seeds
brimming with wisdom
as they drop.

Just one bite and she is fallen
further into this garden
of joy

and there will be no banishment,
no reckoning,
no shame for opening
a gift offered freely.

Here, I make the rules,
and she is welcome
to plant herself beside me,
where the pleasures
of loving bloom.

SLAKE

ELLEN CLAYTON

I embody abundance –
magic flows from the folds
of my thighs.
Pools of desire found
in the soft roundness
of my belly, ready
to satiate.

Tighten your fingers
around my curves,
clutch the flesh
covering my hips
and feast on my
full fat, extra sugar
honey.



AN AWAKENING

ALEXIS MITCHELL

I float against the currents of the earth. my thighs touch. then spread. and all contours are cupped like palms pressed in prayer. like hungry mouths. an oasis of midnight breaths. an honoring of this flesh. and a stream of crimson runs through it. even the moon sweeps along the peaks and valleys. where the well never runs dry. there's a devotion to this body. a lament followed by a guttural cry.



SILK & WIRE
CARELLA KEIL



silk and wire
false eyelashes
a dynamite smile.

the smooth cliché of her body

she'll answer a prayer
for every one
of your kisses

SUMMERTIME SADNESS

JAYA AVENDEL

after Lana Del Rey

I am lying under waning moon
With the world cupped between my shoulder blades and
Sun balanced on my breasts.

I have my pink nightgown on tonight
The one that smells of crushed rose and vintage dreams
My skin merges with this cloth
I am pure music
Reverberating through silver wine cup.

I want the dark to see my legs
Trail his fingers across my skin
Write dreams I will remember in ebony ink.

I feel it swell and break
Music orchestrated in the star-studded sky
Meteor shower
Spills down my ribs like water that vibrates with
Summertime sadness.

BLUE DUSK

JAYA AVENDEL

Crushed rose petal and gemstone
Wicked snap of jasmine
Summertime sadness wreaks melody
Gloved hands rake through blue dusk.

She breaks against you
White lace tied in French knot
Threads of desire burst from her mouth.

It is dusk that seeps through pores of
Shining skin and pervades your being like music
Torn from the heartache of forever.

Listen to the rhythm of her body
Intentionally lose yourself to her touch
Reset the silver clock dials
Preserve her twilight beauty in immortal wine.

She lingers on in
Silk skirts laced with bramble tears and
Crimson slipper. Swallow the desire in her eyes
Watch her turn to salt spray foaming with blue dusk and
Rejoice in her final celebration of life.

DIRTY MAGIC

JODIE OAKES

I dream of you three times
Even though Bonnie says
I shouldn't play with dirty magic.

In a fit of languid spring madness
I rub my wrist on the inside collar
Of the coat you left behind.

I think if I show my face
For seven days straight
I will become unforgettable.

I'm trying to make a feast of my famine
Where every crumb gets cut
With the finest silver

The flash of a blade
Bearing down
on something sinuous.

In my stomach
A poison walnut husk
Spikes the fat full moon
Of childish desire.

I take my blood magic to town,
Driving fast past sunflowers
Broken and bowed.

Listening to angry music
Made by all the bony boys
Who never loved me.

What's one more for the list.

We sit in the May sun
Perched above the city
Like pegs on a clothesline

I'm only hanging myself out to dry.

I answer questions never asked
And grab every static crackle of electricity
From an overarching sky



I want something to shatter my bones

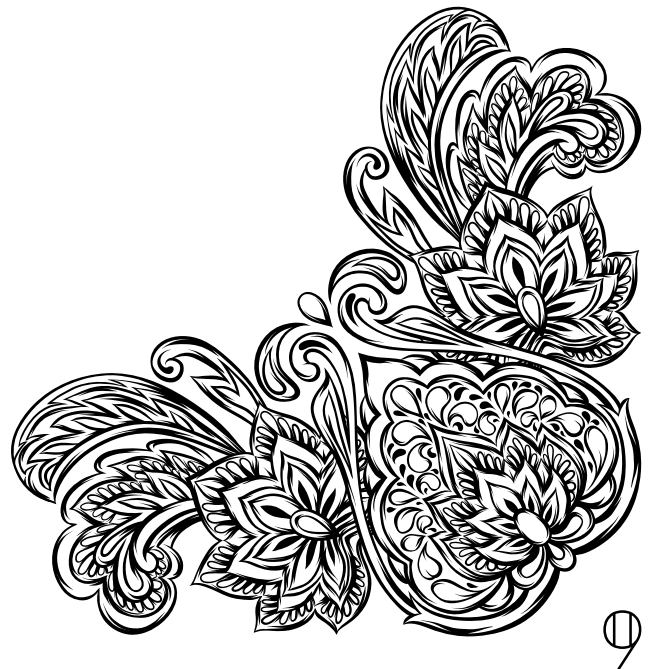
Break me in a different way
This bed is where your old self
Comes to die.

I want you to tell me
All the things
You hate about yourself
So I can hate them too.

Come and mess up my pretty face
Let me drown in suede and saltwater
We are all dead anyway

We are all beautifully

Alive



PASSION WINGS

LORI ZYBALA

alluring shadow threads upon the ceiling
sensuous shape, sends temptation, reeling

aura – *transcended*, heart rapidly pounding
dialect of desire, vibrates the chambers surroundings

blue vein pulses, clenching at the brain
eloquence of beauty, slowly driving him insane

feminine deity, seduction angel of doom
lust's apparition, twice circles the room

...

passion wings fondly whisper, "*What is your name?*"
allurement deployed – seduction clamps upon the heart

bedchamber adversary or opponent of good?
power thrives in the darkness, manipulator manhood

...

seduction, temptation, mind matter restraints
darkness into morning *day into night*

fact or fiction, dreaming, not dead
room rotating rapidly, paralyzed in the ivory bed

...

obscure nine months, alters life's flow
electric battle impending hold tight

sorrow infiltrates, forging a dark veil
paternal worn jewel, blind force fight

fate's entity circling pivots
wrapping grief's suffocating blanket
passion wings captured defeated

a prophecy eyewitness
the seventh seal rapture
misery silently lies in the ivory bed

NAKED MOUNTAINS

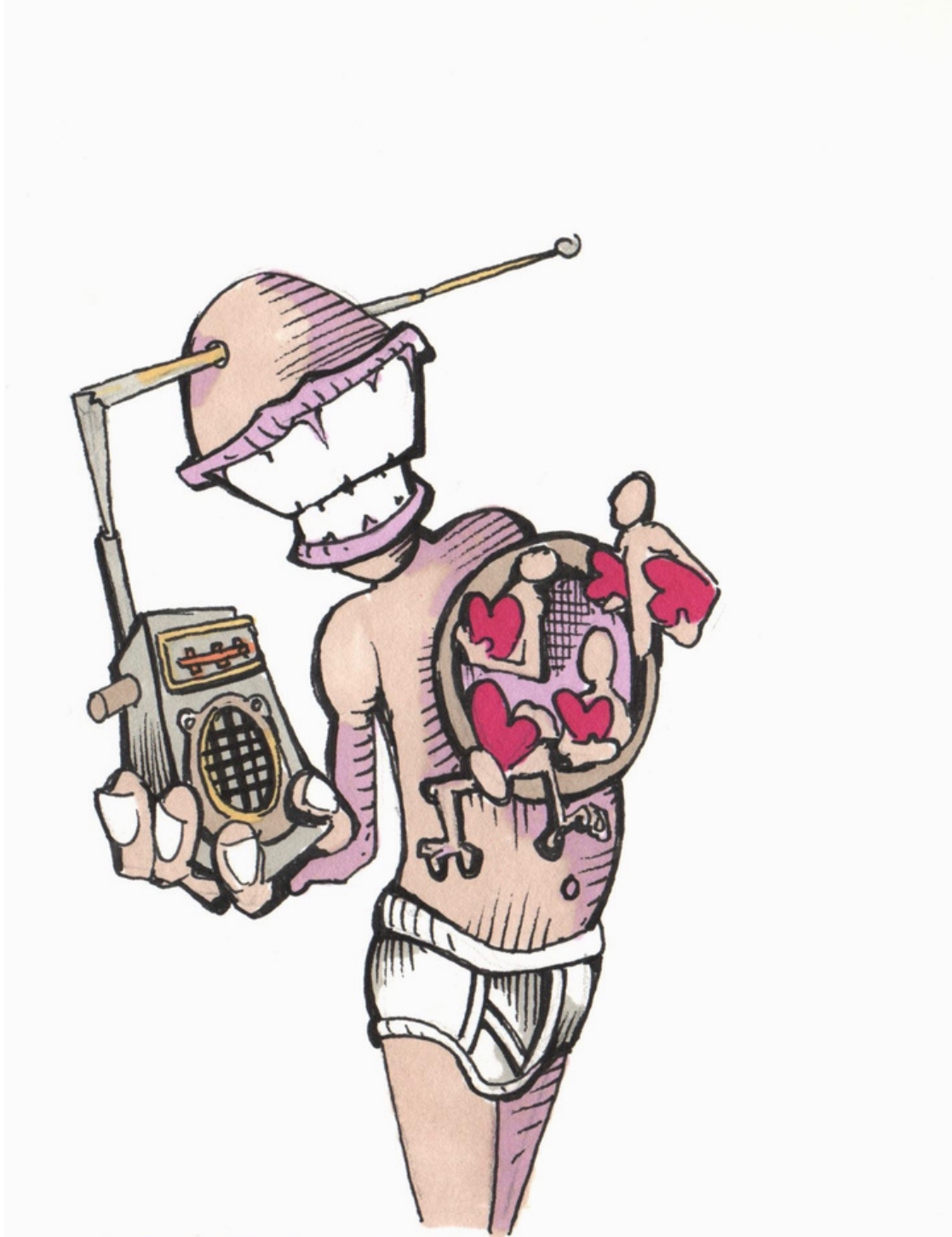
DUNA HALLER

Breathe drain calm loosen up:
the world is gigantic with bitter oceans,
the plane thunders all over my house &
your face is flooded like boskage in April.

Drawing in sand, waiting for violets, recognizing
all this chaos of precipitating erosions,
choosing family is necessary survival
& the lavender panic of nearness
becomes a fanned pomp in the takeoff,
so in her dreams fairy grows wings.

There are a million ways to love,
with sweat & roses & joints & surges,
& while I write this I know my loves are
in intertwined walks, fucked up by accounts,
looking at graves in the eyes, rocking out those jeans,
moving out of haunted houses, signing up in shattered boards,
all of them ways to love
that remain engraved in the substratum of the mountain.

FROM THE SERIES: LUCKY'S FRIEND
KFARRELL



MELUSINE

KATE MACALISTER

cut me deeper
as we hide beneath the floorboards
creaking with your strange rebellion

it is centuries old

my hunger is a shapeshifting oath
a castle of rage and sand
a home full of silver scales
a tidal wave pouring moon songs

out of my hair
into your hands
a wishing
well
a prayer
holy from the waist
down

at sunset
the long shadows
become blackened pages
tangled in seaweed
where you and I are
sea serpents
sirens
enchantingly
calling for Death
to all men

all that is left
for the ritual is
to collect the husks
and shells

please hold
my sea glass
between the small wrecks and reefs
of your scarred porcelain fingers
don't wash me out
tomorrow

please hold
my heart in that
vast ocean of your calling
cast on the dark legged sky
witness the
rebirth of Venus
in a storm of salt
in my mortal eyes

I don't care about
the broken things
we leave behind

Just drive.

LADY DAY AND PREZ

EVA LYNCH-COMER

We lay on a blanket while the breeze stirs the grass around us. I turn my palms to the sun and exhale so deeply my chest touches my spine. He starts picking flowers and I do the same. I present him with my bundle,

“For you, Prez,” I say with a deep bow. “For you, Lady Day,” he replies. I go first and arrange the flowers into a crown in his afro. A blue perennial in the middle, the crown jewel, flanked by two white magnolias whose petals bloom as soon as they touch his hair. I spread dandelions evenly around his head. When I am done I lean back to admire my work.

Now it is my turn. I close my eyes when the flower stems prick my scalp. My shoulders slump in relief and my breaths do not need to dig as deep. Prez plants the baby’s breath in my afro and starts humming, *Loving You*. I join him with a lower harmony while he adds the lavender. He braids the lavender stems into small sections of my hair so they won’t fall off. He squeezes a few pieces so the fragrance will last long after we part. As our song winds down Prez adds one last touch—one large gardenia behind my left ear. Then uses the petals to wipe away the fresh tears that have slipped down my eyes.

He places both hands on either side of my face. I lean into his palms which are stained with sweet lavender and breathe. I breathe for so long my breaths become light and airy, like a breeze sending dandelion seeds to new homes. So long, the sun tucks her rays into the blanket of the night sky.

And even then he holds me, his hands never shaking from fatigue. Only when I raise my head does he let his arms fall. I take his hands into mine and brush my lips along his palms, kiss the heels of his hands, his wrists, kiss each fingertip, then look up into his eyes, which are the dark brown of a rain-soaked tree. We exchange small soft smiles, then I stand, brush the grass from the back of my skirt, and gather my things, lightly touching his shoulders before I go.

FAIRYTALE OF NORTHUMBERLAND

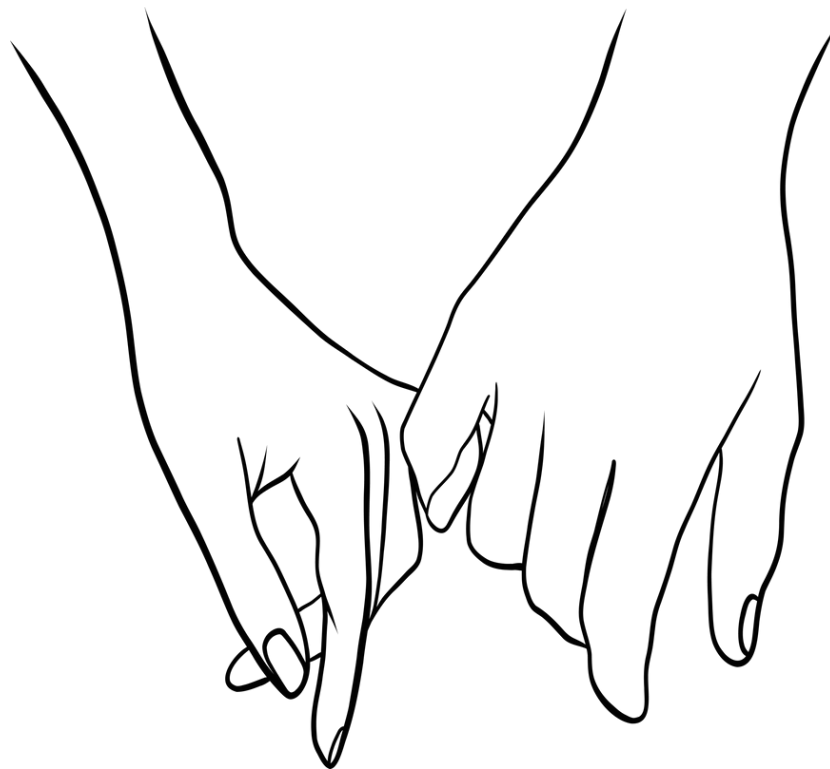
INGRID WILSON

Camelot towers tall above
the river where we walk
our senses are attuned to love;
our tongues, to lovers' talk

Afternoon sun, meandering
through a haze of August heat
beats time to lovers' wandering
and measures of delight

Such days as in a dream I pass
with you, happily spent
as salmon leap, the air to bless
in frenzied merriment

Just as my heart leaps at your kiss,
caresses upon waking
your silhouette, profiled in this
moment: ours for the taking



I WALK AWAY

RACHEL DICKENS

I see patterns and hues
I observe yellows, greens, and blues
Rattan patterns I've seen in décor,
Colours we've stolen for splendour.
Homes tilted, on the transcendent horizon.
I look back at my love and my son,
I wonder what it's like to be descriptive
poet with bundles of words,
with bunches of verbs.
I look up at the birds,
There are many moons
and a rolling sky,
on top of the dunes.

FLEDGLING

RACHEL DICKENS

The place where the sun never shines
Inside the heirloom bird box.
A strand of hair, weaved nest.
After the grief of last year

One has fled the nest.
One stayed nearby,
we think
Or did she hide,
Wishing she was unhatched,
fragile, folded bones.

I am striving, but happy,
After the petrichor, soft, morning light.
My time has come and
I fly away over citrus and pine
zested fields.



WITCHES BE LIKE/BURN IT ALL DOWN/KISS ME
KATE MACALISTER

I map you out / beneath the falling stars
we know our way / we didn't get lost at all
on the overgrown riverbank / the candles burn all night
I would let you /take me/down

maybe we can find your places here / at the bottom of it all
we can turn each stone/skip the surface /watch each other /
dance in the ripples of this / alluvial mirror /

it was not the end.

maybe we could move /to the City of Lights /or the edge of the forest
the end of the world /so bewildered in your depths/ask me again
how I would liberate you /on the left side of my bed
how you would free me /entangled in your pain

crushed and suffocated /against the bedroom wall
I'll bring you coffee/when you breathe again

I am not catching feelings
I am catching fire

sometimes we spell / love

revolt.

UPON FINDING YOU LEFT YOUR RAZOR IN MY
MEDICINE CABINET ON PURPOSE

CHLOE ADAMS

When I find it resting on my cabinet shelf
Beside loose ibuprofen and Lexapro
It's not that I get the urge to lick your razor
It's just that maybe this is the only way I have known romantic love
My tongue is blade, too sharp
Applied dry and rough, a shave in the sink when you don't have time for the shower
But sometimes I am the receiver of the hurt
Blade running reckless over my own slick pink heart
Either way someone is bleeding

Hey, I'm sorry I'm so bad at this
Hey, when you are used to blade, tender is an odd touch
Hey, when I take an attachment style quiz, it comes back fearful avoidant
Which means I am stricken by both facts-
That the word "girlfriend" would catch in my throat upon introductions, that I would
break Spotify crying to old Adele if you ever leave
Which is like heart, pick a problem babe
And my heart says babe, look deeper
These are really the same problem
So, hey, love you
Hey, I promise-
I'll try to believe that the only blade ever in our love will be the razor you left in my
medicine cabinet

ASH AND PINE

EVA LYNCH-COMER

After Tereus cut my tongue out
and chased me into the woods with an ax
I ran home to my sister Procne.
Without my tongue, I could not form the words
to tell her what happened
so I sewed black stars into my quilt
with a streak of red thread
slicing their bodies.

Procne ran her fingers across the quilt,
outlined the black stars in silver,
placed a warm towel above my head,
and left a glass of water by my bed.
On the days I could not get up to bathe
she waved sage over my quilt,
dabbed lavender oil on my wrists.
Procne dried orange peels
in my window sill and left the door cracked
in the mornings so our dog, Ash,
could kiss me awake.

On the day Ash led me to the door
Procne was waiting for us outside.
Our feet and paws crunched on pine needles.
A nightingale landed on Procne's left shoulder
and a swallow landed on mine.
Ash did not bark at either of them
rather we all walked together
watched rain drip into puddles.

The birds followed us home
perched on our roof
and sang to us
while I prepared our tea.

Procne added a nightingale to the quilt,
I added a tiny swallow bird next to hers,
and sewed silver raindrops
above the red thread.
When Ash laid pine cones
at the foot of my bed
I arranged them into a crown
upon my head.

SEDUCING THE LIONS' HEART
EMMA CONALLY-BARKLEM

I bathe in otto of roses

Moths release dust like ashes

A mandala of wings burnt holy

Voluptuous enigma of fragrant promise

Life in death

petit mort

Your vision is minstrel black

Helios has no equal to the liquid homage that wells Scent-marked you see in the dark.

Sweet mercury sienna

Inert Minerva of desire

An antelope's acquiescence, in the final shudder

Seducing the lion's heart

Deep beating savannah

He tried to save me with claws through my hair

The alpha's time is short-winged – rare – glory

The rest

A roil in the dirt

Hurt paws never tended

Still, I plaited a Persian silk route

To his lair

ELOISA TEXTS ABELARD
JONATHAN CHAN

the last time she
ever saw his face

was in a cell:
dark around the edges,

marred by deep
solitude, caused

by the thickness of plague
in the air and a twelve-

hour cleft. she kissed
his name, remembered

how stern religion
had smothered her

heart, filled all the
corners in her mind.

a face was too
much: she unfollowed,

cut him from her
feed, only let excitement

swell with the hourly
ellipses. soul to soul,

somehow purer, just
the soft intercourse

of words. her eyes would
smile, lambent, lights warm

and blue. looking away, she
saw the odd bird on a branch,

the sweeper down
the street. she tried

hard to quit in this bright
abode, to block his

calls, to learn to love
alone, to make a burning

shrine at home. what
space could she find

between penitence
and love? grace

surrounds her, she reads.
peaceful beams and golden

dreams. his image still
between God and she. from

pole to pole, mountains
rise and oceans roll. come

sister, she says, with each
steady hum, her fingers

aching to reply, come.
the world will reset, and

the world will forget. a
prayer received is a wish

resigned. turning
aside, she streams

*Eternal Sunshine of the
Spotless Mind.*

THE LOVE JINX

CHLOE ADAMS

In the year of drawing hearts on our hands in blue ballpoint,
when the quarterback surreptitiously Facebook messages her,
Maddie tells us not to talk about it, not to discuss them getting together.
If we dream of it, it will dissipate in the light.
She will not get the glory of this particular date.
And we will all be relegated to slumber party sadness, no boys waiting outside our windows.
Some sort of strange love jinx.

And I have believed in this for the last decade.

That speaking love into the air
puts a target on its flighty back.
That if I stare at what I am holding for too long,
my hands will become hourglass,
dry sand ticking downward through my fingers, love running out.
That if I don't just pour the cup,
but actually drink,
love will liquid fire down my throat.
Stop at my heart and burn a hole right through my chest.
That I will turn ocean.
Be too much love at high tide,
wetting everyone's feet, leaving them sand-soaked and fidgety.
Be too little at low tide,
didn't they all come here to see more than this?
More than my pulling away?
That admission of feeling will be explosion,
launching bits of splattered love across the disillusionment left behind.

So what of my love superstition-revisited ten years later?
Holding back never works anyway.
Maddie never dated the quarterback.
Never sat at his lunch table or wore his jersey on game days.
It didn't work, our silenced hope.
We all felt it anyway.

So, no more shoving my bleeding love through the strainer.
No more shaking its wet gore through the sifter,
distilling down,
grinding or thinning.
I'll take all of it.
The bloody pulp and glory.

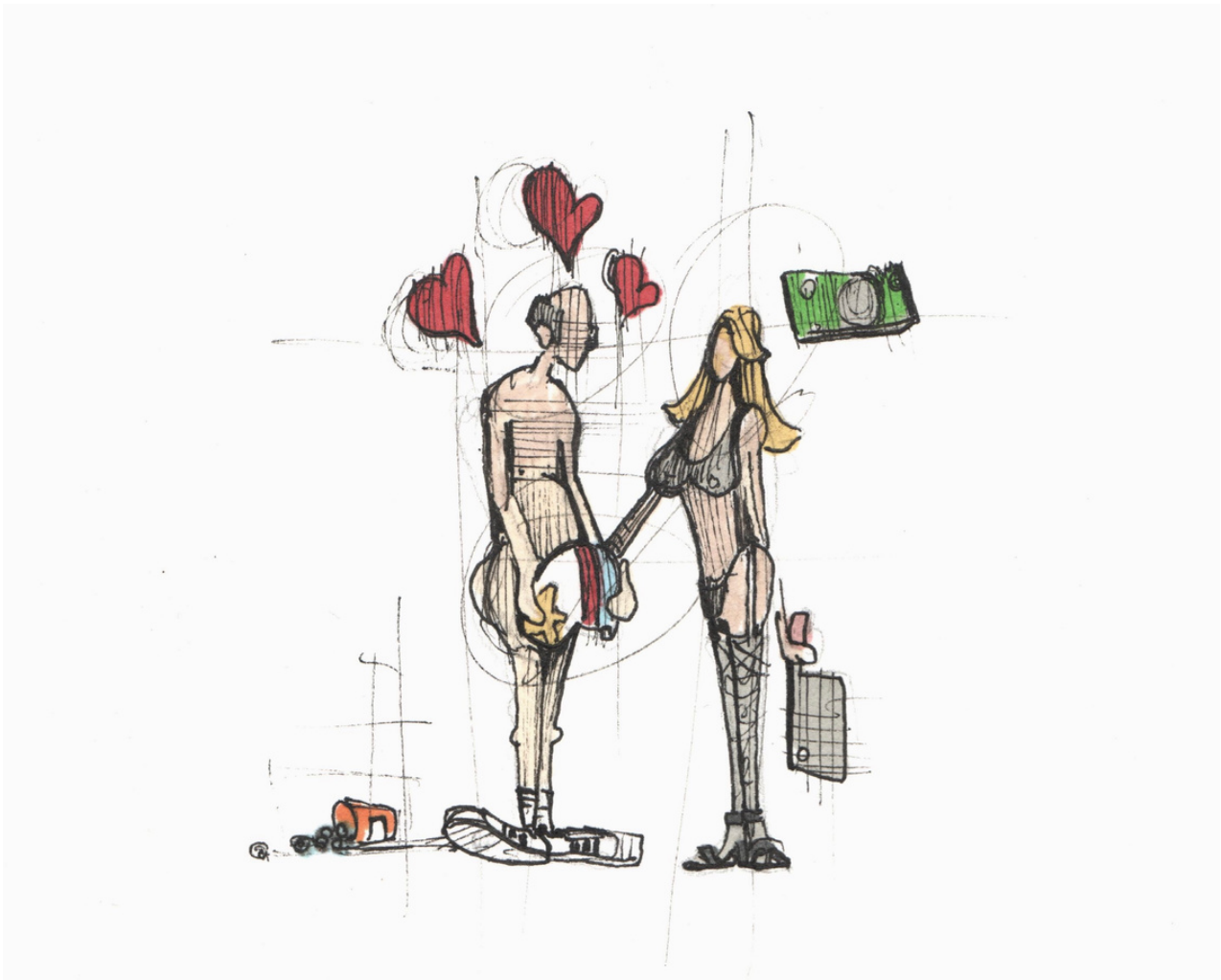
DOMESTIC TRAGEDY
JONATHAN CHAN

after Mikio Naruse's Repast

husband waits, leg bent, ashtray full,
arched over newspaper, stray grains
in an empty bowl. his tie lies limp,
shirt pressed by musk and sweat. his
gaze she shall never meet, clatter
of pots, forearm trembling from
floors wiped clean, lip curved in
blissful yearning, the wrinkles of
her eyes suggesting a dream, for
the old adage of youthful abandon,
head against mat, kimono worn
loosely, qualms swallowed by the
rush, the processions along a
Tokyo street. unprepared for
the quietude of an unharried
husband, foregone dream etched
in a letter, fluttering out of a train
shuttle's window, the empty bliss
of a gaze unmet.

First published in *The Madrigal*.

FROM THE SERIES: LUCKY'S FRIEND
KFARRELL



WEDDING DAY

JODIE OAKES

I sit outside the blood bank
As storm clouds roll in
Katy says
Everything is bigger in Texas
The sky was a torn artery
You were inside
Selling white cells
For change
That would rattle
In your pocket
Like teeth after a fever
They took the good
And pumped the weak back in
Sometimes, we write our own curses

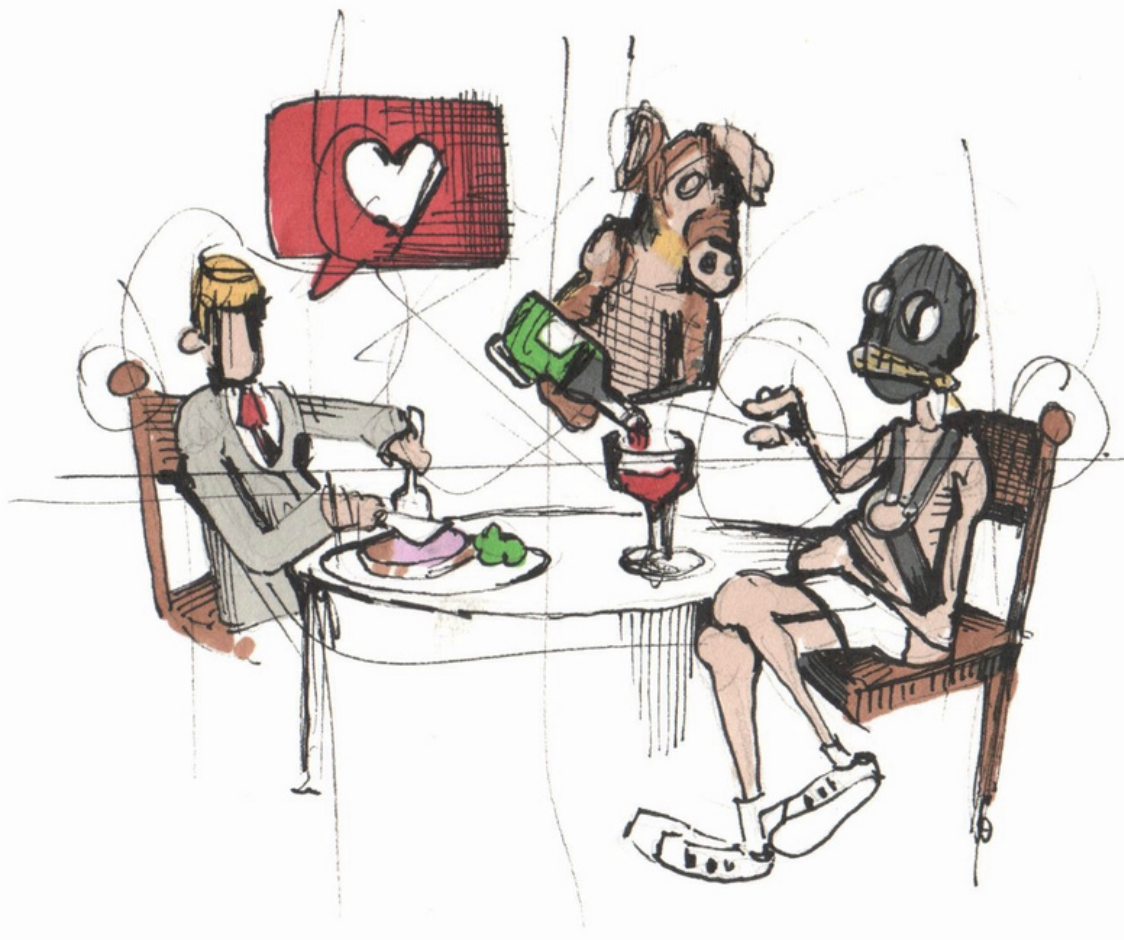
The ring you bought
Was too small
And had a spelling error
Its smaller now
That I have grown
To be a woman
With careless hands
Back then I was delicate
In a bad haircut
I'm delicate now
But more solid like soil,
Heavy in the hands

Your grandmother took me
To buy a bouquet
She asked what flowers I liked
And I just kept saying
I don't know, I don't know.
Wanting someone else
To show me how it's done.
I ended up with lilies
Too fragrant and tall
Sometimes we write our own curses.

What was the night?
And we fucked on the floor
Of your childhood bedroom
I drank too many margaritas
And accidentally flashed my tits
all bone and sinew
In a dress I had borrowed
From a dead friend

You couldn't write that shit.

FROM THE SERIES: LUCKY'S FRIEND
KFARRELL



FROM THE SERIES: LUCKY'S FRIEND
KFARRELL



THE BOOK OF TOXIC

JOHN DE GRUYTHER

Wearing nail polish is “gay”, sold the idea that crying was not okay, sex only for reproducing, all designed for reducing, lies on such a fantastic scale, an epic betrayal, a poisoned pyramid scheme to trick me whole.

So Sandi wrote a response, I hope you cried with her. How can a door ever be closed, when standing naked with a crown of thorns, he offers an open invitation to forgive infinitely.

A List of Things Done Wrong in the Book of Toxic

Braided my hair
Wore eyeliner
Fancied Hugh Jackman
Walked barefoot
Ran fleet foot
Hummed Fleet Fox
Didn't sit in my box
Got pierced
Sang from the heart
Played guitar too loud or too slow,
Forgot the words
Hated the show

What a thrill it must be to finally be free, to just be me, I am almost there I think, still have a few more bags to shed, so I just got another tattoo and it said,
“Fuck you. I won't do what you tell me.”
I am here to love, simple as that, no caveat,
I've burnt them all, and oh what a pyre, burning with joyful malevolence, because all my fucks have been given, relinquished unbidden.

I grieve our relationship, that is dead, time of death unknown, but it's somewhere amongst the ashes of our bitter throne, kept pumping it full of half-felt promise, blowing at the embers, trying to rekindle photographic nostalgia into a flame for tomorrow, but all I felt was sorrow.

And when the process is followed to the source of the river, I will sit there waiting for the dawn of my own full awakening, meditating with the spirit of humble heroic makings. Then cross-leg pose, like Kermit lily-pad living, laugh hysteric, because the answer is reflectively thrilling. I am, I am, I am me, there is power in three, it should mean free.

YOU HELD MY HAND BUT HAD NOWHERE
TO TAKE ME
CARELLA KEIL

Black and white faces, green eyes and my face cupped in the palm of your hand. Trust is a four letter word handcuffed to the bed. We can't find the key so we dismantle the bed instead.

There's a glass of water left on the dresser, I haven't awoken thirsty in months. I used to dream of waterfalls, fountains cascading around my bare feet. But now, hiding between your sweaty shoulder blades, I dream of nothing at all. Copper pennies and salted tears, the stain of last night's wine on my teeth, I tuck them in the broken drawer on the right between the silky nothings you never tempt me to wear.

Snorting salt and crushing crystal, the promise of sweet illusive gardens and emerald palaces drowning in your eye. I'm only free when far from home, and so I'm always running. You held my hand, but had nowhere to take me, so eventually we both let go.

For months I ached with the taught promise of lovers circling each other like tigers, amber eyes locked, limbs ready to pounce. But every night we slept beneath heavy sheets, rarely unfolding to desire.

I wanted you to know me deeper than skin.

Once I skipped across a rusty bridge and saw pieces of mars in the sidewalk. I felt the moon in my wings and forgot I couldn't fly. There was a magic in me. I wanted it back, if only for an instant. I stopped eating, sleeping. I lost track of the pills because the stars were blotting out the days. My skin dissolved. Sunbeams stung like jellyfish. The sound of your thoughts hurt my ears. I felt everything, with such intensity. Reality became pliable, a dream for me to shape any way I wanted. Everyone else moved slow as insects in molasses. I felt sorry for them.

I sprinted down the middle of the road, daring traffic to stop for me. I needed to tug my body loose. I needed as far away from this life as possible. Trying to outrun a manic episode is like trying to outrun an eclipse. Eventually blackness swallows everything. Oh, but those moments of staring straight at the sun!

Silver wrists and asphalt skies, the sinking feeling of staring up at the clouds when my head is spinning with too much me. I couldn't remember how the streets went together, but I knew it had something to do with the mesh in my veins. The entire world was suspended in my arteries, kisses were giant pink planets, I spun at the core of it all.

You looked so tired and sad.

Two weeks I sat inside the mirror, watching myself on the other side. Flat blue rhythm world, vibrating at my fingertips. Little salt and sugar packets fascinated me, I was tempted to comb my hair with a fork. Cameras never left my face, I felt safe and protected. And then like thread through a needle, they pulled me through into someone else.

Handcuffs rattling in the corner, and our lives are thrown on the floor. You step over me like something empty, I've left you unfulfilled. I tried to show you it would be like this. Wait for you to wipe away the dreams caught in my eye. I dig through piles of dirty laundry, hunting for those orange afternoons, pigtails and warm sinks of soap and you hungry mauling tender. Purple cave evenings, heavy breathing. Your kisses between my toes in the bathtub. I try to believe in something beautiful. "Get your head out of the clouds" you say. No, see, I'd rather not. You've turned me into something very ugly, and I don't like your face anymore. You hold the door for me as I leave. In reality, I don't look back. But, under the cover of dreams, I always do.

I still sleep on the edge of the bed, and imagine you undressing me the way you did the first time, like the moon stripping the shore. Bare. But I always walk away. Sometimes I wake in the middle of the night, one hand clasped within the other, and I realize there are bridges I was meant to cross alone.

First published in Writeresque Volume 5



IN THE RECURRING MORNING

SHIR ARIYA

You lifted my wrist
“Where’s your watch?”
and my heart broke for seven months afterwards.

I cried seventy-two times on my favourite hill
to the memory of your face
while we fucked.
The clouds rolled past
and you finished up fucking and twisted me
out-of-focus
like the silver wheels on your camera.

I scratched too many adjectives
into the corner of my notebook
hoping it would make you less important
in the flesh.
I scratched you out into the world unnoticed
but it only became you
blasted you with light from all the right angles.

You didn’t like that movie we saw
separately.
I felt close to your review
you felt close to checking your phone for the minutes left.
We could’ve formed our opinions together
as the credits rolled
but you simply couldn’t wait.

Your life darts at breakneck speed
past my idiot head
into the stars.
I miss you until going home means drinking or smoking
means finding you in the curled tail of tobacco
means finding you in the wine
means finding you in the recurring morning

where it stings infinitely to wake.

HOMEcomings OF WORDS

SANKET MHATRE

I wait
for the longest beat to ache
deepest bell to resound
before I call your name...
gauging the purity of my throb
what beats within – should be a brimming heart
not an empty soul shaking in the night for cover
I wait
through morphine afternoons
when the body twists and turns into a conjoined dream
the medicine (the cure between transience and temperature)
keeps working its way on my body like waves of Palolem sea
I wait
weighing words against memories
memories against poetry
poetry against noise
noise against feeling
feeling against time
only to arrive
to a deepest homecoming of words

COALS IN THE RAIN

ELYSE WELLES

sparks on a flint
I brushed your warmth
for the last time

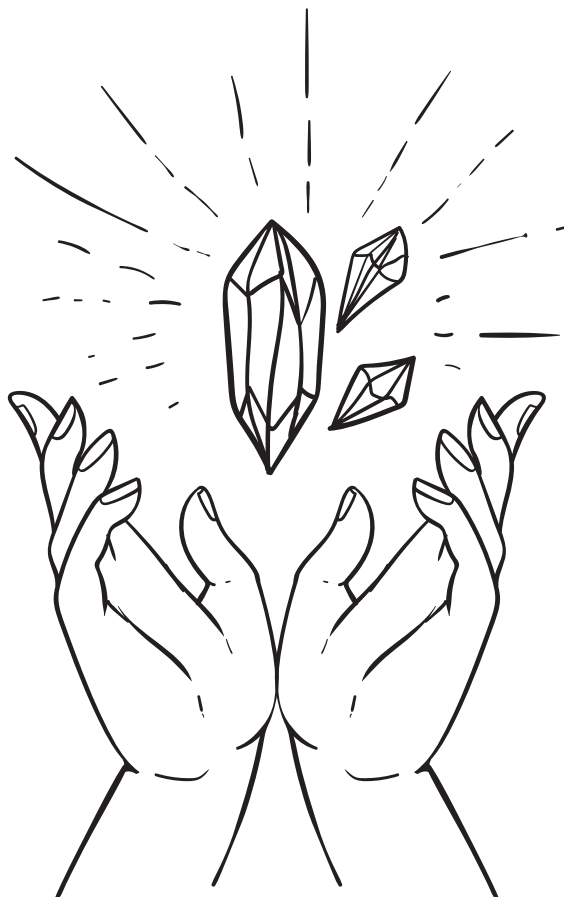
I thought life was a circle
round and returning simply
an illusion in the flames

Maybe I knew that was the end
But how could I understand
that we would have no more beginnings

dampened by time
I now embrace the cold
The illusion died with the flames

now all that remains is the truth:
life is a spiral
transfiguring as it flows

returns are not reanimations
coals do not reignite
in the



KATE, I REMEMBER
EVYENIA DOWNEY

Yesterday's breakfast married to the pan; her mug
 half full
of cold coffee,
 half empty
with the silence of a broken home.

 Hungry mirrors,
 undressed closets,
and the mattress I left behind
 pressed naked against the wall,

 as my body once did.

 If this is end
 and the paint chips beneath our fingertips
are necessary,
 let them be hidden
 with the forgotten

discharge on our hands.

 Let them be sick with her clots
 one more time
 until it seems reasonable
that I could change her
 like a pair of wet socks
 in uncommitted footwear.

 Here,
 we were young
 until we were old.

Here,
 too young to feel so old.

 You were with me,
 incorporeal and unforgiving,

pressed naked against the wall.

WHEN ASKED ABOUT HER ABSENCE
AT CHRISTMAS DINNER
MAGGIE KAPRIELIAN

I will not recount the amount of times I flipped through radio stations,
just to fill the void of dull silence on the car ride into town.

I will not describe the exhaustion of carrying a tree up seven flights of stairs,
all to decorate the dilapidated branches with tangled lights
and delicate ornaments my hands haven't managed to drop,
til they're nothing but shattered fragments of memories and glass.

I will not tell my relatives from the suburbs how New York
is supposed to be the most radiant during the month of December,
yet I cannot help but feel withered,
and blue, and all but radiant.

She led me to believe her love
wasn't something seasonal,
rather, constant.

Yet, just like how department store windows
discard of their displays after New Year's,
or how television programs eventually
stop re-running sappy holiday rom-coms,
her infatuation melted out of existence.

And it's tragic;
because if I close my eyes,
I can still picture our heads resting
on each other around the illuminated tree,
just like how things were last year.

So instead of reciting how lonely December 25th feels
I will simply fabricate and smile, and toast to the notion of denial,
when asked about her absence at Christmas dinner.

TRAFFIC

JONATHAN CHAN

Singapore

through the rustle of
humid leaves and the

evening call
of the muezzin, almost

balmy, the night meets
the thickness of a door

panel. gliding down
the expressway,

grey stretch dim beneath
a halogen light, a husk

of the evening rush, drinking
the shallow pull

of a long turn
around the pillar

beneath the overpass,
a playlist feeds

a dormant tug. she dreams
of a sudden kiss or burning

look, the reversal of day
and night, the blight

of an encounter,
and a farewell, all as she

falls asleep, late at night
at high speed. another

morning comes, plastic
beat still throbbing. two

people appear
in a shop window. a new

season bleeds across
the sky. a needle

pins an electric vinyl. be
sweet to me, she sings.

be sweet to her, i think.

ARI

ROBIN L HARVEY

I used to watch you, dear heart
twinkle-eyed, always
your tender laugh rang in Clair-de-Lune trickles
across our joyful, hot-tea mornings

as steam rose from the cup to my heart
we sipped the wisdom
of two who had stared down the breach
to stand against all odds
and the tick-tock of borrowed time

your easy silence soothed my endless chatter
on the best days we had one soul

you, a child of virtue, an arc of orchids
me, a seeker of fame, a skipping stone

two eager for the crunch of leaves
longing to melt in blankets of snow

the day you died the dawn cried
too soon, you'd let go my hand
and walked into the breach where
my mortal feet
so clumsy, could not stand
or rise to say goodbye

after we buried you in white-dusted earth
alone, I poured a cup of tea
and gathered close in memory
the footfalls of our journey

then came your farewell gift
in a breeze as pink blossoms fell
words of comfort
strong yet meek:

“Spread wisdom like honey on a spoon.
Grab life when it greets you, hat in hand.
Soar like a hawk with quiet grace,
but land lightly like a dove.

Face truth as a treasure, not a battlefield.
Keep a tempered heart and an open mind.
Each dusk, make a promise to tomorrow's sun.
And to remember me, dear heart? Forgive.”

SLID BY THE GREATEST
HASIB IFTEKHAR

(...and the poetics are lost)

Mere with a quill, he sang His magnum opus,
An orchestra from fingers to carbon. And thus far,
He offset the maladies of his own heart.
The intractable high horse, that thing monumental.

In him, he saw mighty darkness and
championed his narrative around.
His pent-up peeves and side-slithering vermin.
He looked up and met the eye for one last time.

Then He lay gently down in bed,
Thoroughly washed and fully clothed - vivifying a funeral,
Nothing morose there, all watchfully curated.

A wink before, another gesture He had minded,
and drank casually from the cup -
A pre-dated manifestation -
Of poison chalice.

Nobody stifled after; no one caught short.
Hardly was there a sigh hinting grief.
Left soon - The Police - Coroner -
Aficionados - Idolizers - Mates, lovers.

Memories of Him took a stroll and went
missing in time,
like the forlorn mist to a sunlit kiss.
No tracks, no footprints,
Only texts were in the trails,
To revive a genre century forward.

And the ashes of Him made miasma
in a municipality by the sea,
to the local's utter discontent.

DREAMING OF TSUNAMIS ON THE BEACH

SHIR ARIYA

I spent the summer
dreaming of tsunamis
on the beach

as I listened to the shrieks of children,
domed sandcastles
blooming up all around me.

My parents were reduced to little black
bobbing heads,
shrinking back to the hotel.

The wall of waves rose up,
majestic,
a city border shutting out the daylight.

My body was lifted
and snapped,
swelling round as a melon

like those awful
photographs they showed
to the silent tourists.

I surrendered, saint-like,
to the cosmic stretch
of water.

Somewhere, my parents didn't speak
for the last time,
bathed in artificial dimmer lights.

When the terror clicked in,
my pupils widened,
black yolk crushed between whiteness,

softly, the great shadow
painted my neck,
my open mouth,

swallowing thousands of tiny
screaming heads
on its climb to the clouds.

There was nothing but the vast
blanket of death
left to quiver,

and nest itself
innocently
between my eyelids.

NO BUTTERFLIES

HOWARD YOUNG

Late afternoon stoops and falls across the town,
daytime dreams adorn the doorways
bathed in craving mists of alcohol and hunger.

A child's lost glove is dragged by the wind
to the seafront shelter with a greying view
where ignored un-ironed faces
sleeping bag clad - cluster in the cold
lying fallen, like cocoons in a butterfly house
where the heating has failed,
and the bodies lie fallen,
scattered on the bone bruising floor.

A cold stone hand reaches out
and picks up the tiny glove,
pinhole camera eyes reveal
half glimpses of a lost memory,
of a childhood that seems
a hundred years ago,
PE, bruises, taunts and terror,
and harsh words after school,

His memories are fading
like the print on the old newspapers
on which he lies,
forgotten, confused and torn,
a lost butterfly,
he sadly slips away.



MILTON MANSION
JONATHAN CHAN

Hong Kong

for my grandparents

arriving as a ship is prone to do,
in and out of Victoria Harbour, they

stayed: he, learning to count the
freight, longhand neat in each

diary sheet, she, presiding
over glass counters, jewels glinting

in forlorn tongues. a pipe
rests between his lips, smoke

drifting as he moves a stone, white
around black, building homes

in grids: newspaper clicked and
clacked in hangul, school

song written for those in these
crosswinds, looking back to that

peninsula, halved. she learns
to scrub new tiles, find a

familiar taste of pickling,
watch the stock crowd the

rooms, see the girls grow,
laughing, always semi-

legible, and live with
him, austere, temperate, palms

open for everyone
but her.

Published in going home (Singapore: Landmark Books, 2022)

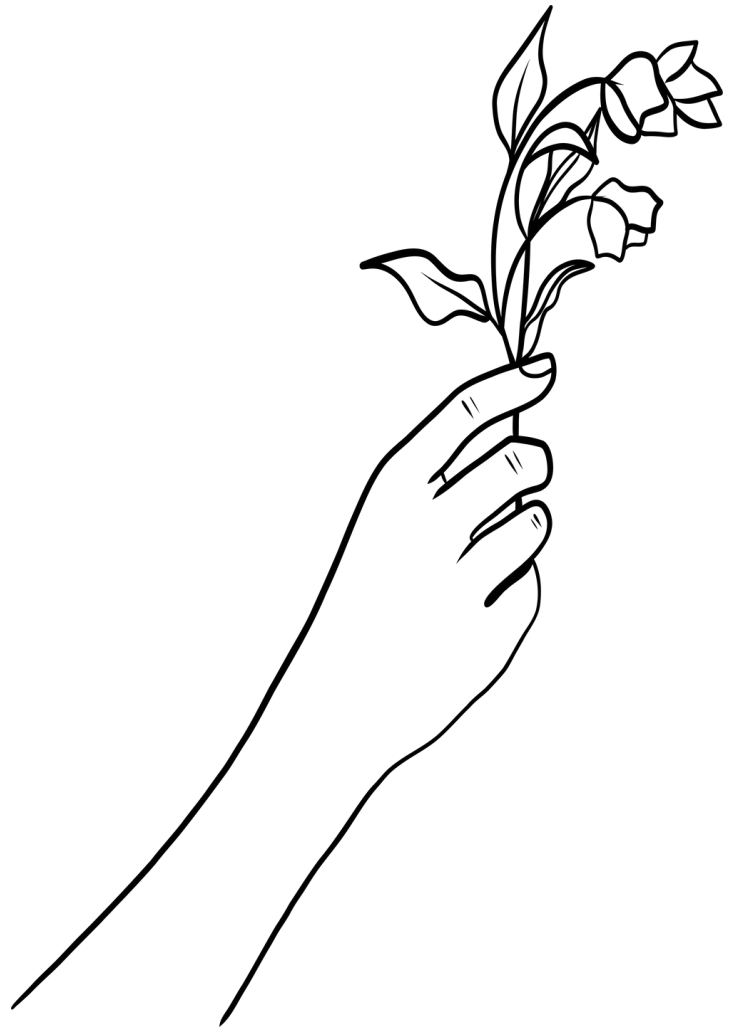
RESHAPING ROOTS

SHREHYA TANEJA

smooth and shiny
white blue pebbles lie strewn
on the shore
after the storm
that uprooted
their strong and firm roots with force
the Banyan tree that crashed
through the roof and burnt the car

after the storm
that made them hunt for
their family histories all over again, their large wall sized family tree
of names and relations
turned to dust leaving sporadic traces
in debilitating memories

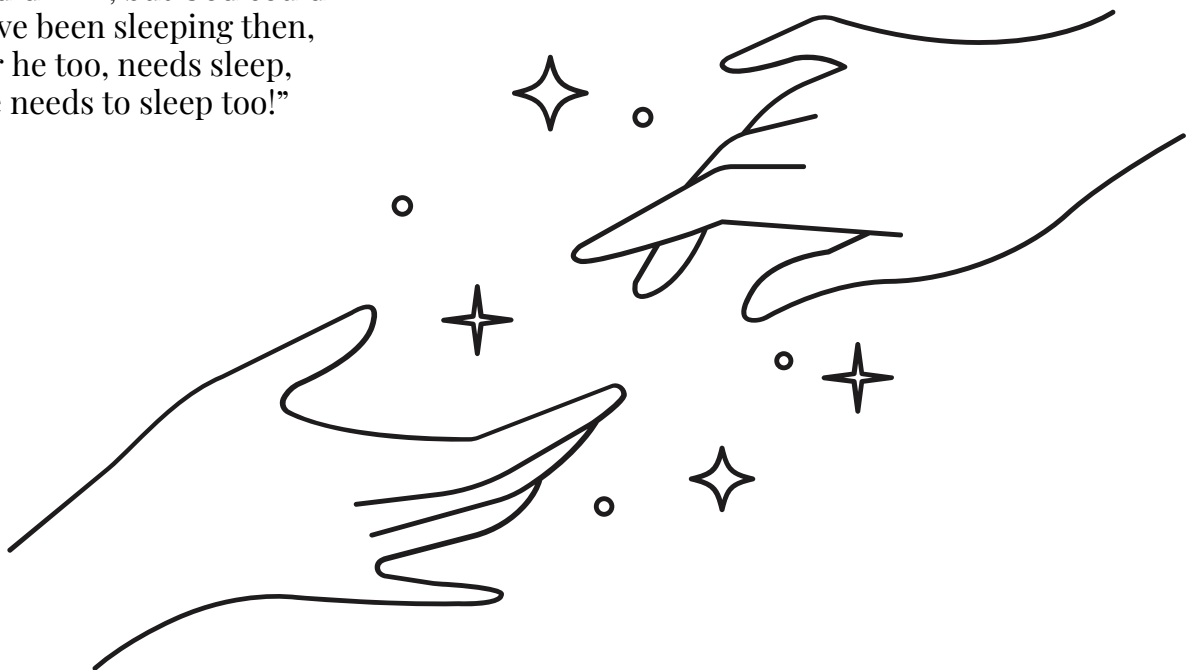
smooth and shiny
white blue pebbles lie strewn
on the shore
after the storm
calling out to the young children
to rename, reframe and reshape
their destiny
free from the burden of
histories



GOD SLEEPS TOO

PRITI TIWARI

Tell me something, will you?
How does one prepare oneself
for any bad news?
In the midst of trying to
deal with it, I ask my boy
to say a special prayer for
his uncle who lies on the
hospital bed unable to tell
sleep from wakefulness.
I tell him to pray, for God listens
to the young more readily
or so I was told, growing up.
I tell him to pray because children
are God's pets just as I was my teacher's.
Pray because there is nothing else
left to do after a point.
But, when these prayers do not reach
their home at their designated time
like wayward children or have
lost their way, scared and
orphaned in the dark,
I jolt my son and question him
begrudgingly if he had betrayed
his promise or dutifully prayed?
He gently replies with a
resigned composure in his eyes,
"I did Maa, but God could
have been sleeping then,
for he too, needs sleep,
He needs to sleep too!"



+/-

ELLEN CLAYTON

Do you see?! There - a line.
It's faint, but I think they say that counts?
I decide I have no patience for ambiguity
so we get another test (an expensive one)
and there's no doubt this time:
it clearly states "Pregnant".
This time (my third pregnancy)
we decide to hold the happy news
close to our hearts, keep it between us
(for a little while at least).

Then, just two days later there's blood.
Cramps, and blood that keeps getting
heavier and heavier along with the
crushing weight on my chest.

Later that week: another stick
shows a blank, empty space
where a line, where hope, had been.
Nothingness — on the display
and inside me. Your existence slipped
out of my grasp, beyond reach.
This time I don't need another test,
no words required to spell out
what my broken heart knows.
Not pregnant.



ANOTHER BIRTH
BARTHOLOMEW BARKER

for Phillis Wheatley

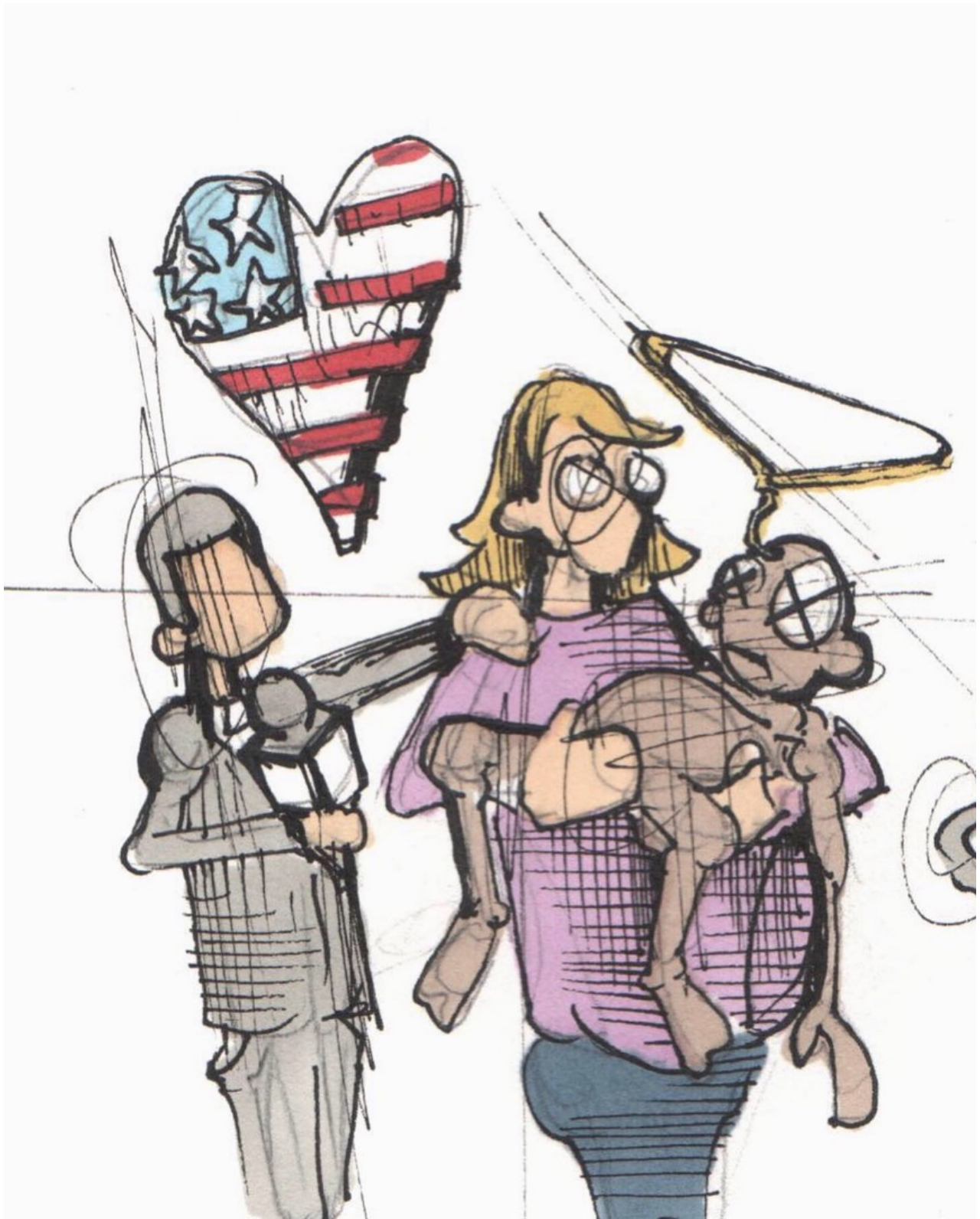
The amniotic fluid smelled sweet
as if my boy had come out covered
in honey— a sticky treacle dessert
after the exhausting meal of labor.

I thought I'd survived the worst—
the climax of the pregnancy—
but what began in toe-curling joy
ends in one more woman's death.

Like so many before me, untold
since the beginning of our race,
I died fulfilled and empty.

I risked my life for my child's,
just like any mother would,
just like every mother has.

FROM THE SERIES: LUCKY'S FRIEND
KFARRELL



DAISY, DANDELION, SUNFLOWER

EVA LYNCH-COMER

The first time a man forced his way into my body
I broke turtle shells in half, filled the cracks
with pink glue, split crickets in half, watched their insides
move and shift like clockwork, wept over
trampled flowers, offered libations of honey,
named all yellow flowers Daisy—even the dandelion weeds.

The second time a man forced his way into my body
I became pregnant but no one could see my baby bump.
I slept on my stomach to flatten my belly as it grew,
drank castor oil and nothing else, stepped over hot steam
to shrivel my baby up. But my baby girl arrived
right in my shower demanding to be seen.
When I turned away, she was propped on the shower wall
like a painting her cries brighter than gold.

I carried my newborn out of the shower wrapped her
in a yellow plastic ShopRite bag tucked the bag around
her like a blanket placed her in a wooden drawer
and tried to forget her.

When the drawer rattled I slipped her packets of sugar
and saltines. When she complained of a dry mouth I poured
her tap water. In winter I heated her tea kept the drawer cracked
so she could get sunlight. While I worked at my desk
I let her hold my finger. I read her my poetry
before bedtime, took her out for bath-time,
wiped leftover sunflower petals from her hair
as I dried her off.

PND

R. S. KENDLE

Be not afraid.

Lay out the darkest secrets and woes you harbour in your heart before us
Alongside the instant coffee and stale cake.
A psychology picked clean.

We are your sisters.

We too have survived the sleepless nights
The nagging voice at the back of our heads.
Itching away at the scab that worries
Festering, oozing guilt.

Run away, run away.
Kill the baby, kill yourself.
End it all, end it all.

A litany of sorrow, guilt, and shame.
The worst of mankind, of my humanity
Stole its way out of the Pandora's box
That is the C-section.

Do not worry sister.

We have seen it all.
Baby blues, PND, postpartum psychosis ...
All are welcome here.

Please pull up a chair, excuse the mess, it's one of "those days".

Our crosses are heavy to bear.
Whilst the stretch marks fade and the medication sets in,
And the pain of childbirth melts into a hazy dream,
We will never forget looking at our babies
Hearts full of pain and hate for them,

And ourselves – that most monstrous mother.
We must carry that guilt and shame to the grave.

It is a long and lonely walk,
But you are in good company here.

FALLIBLE

ELLEN CLAYTON

We are virtually the same height,
yet you tower over me in almost
every way — more grace, wisdom
and capability than I can ever

imagine possessing. My sturdy arm
wraps your slight shoulders
and I am felled by the reminder
of the fragility of human life.

I pull you closer, remember all the
times we've hugged like this before,
wishing I could guarantee
an infinite amount more.

If I believed in a God I would pray,
fervent, on exhausted knees
to be half
the mother you are.

I COULDN'T TELL YOU WHAT WAS IN MY BENTO

SAMMI YAMASHIRO

Because the universe in my *Maimero* box drafted its own ending –
like its own final glacial period. Like dinosaurs befallen, drawn to the magnetic core
of indecisive Mother Earth. You want mammoths. Or triceratops? No, no.
Tsuna-mayo onigiri triangulating from the pink bento floor like teepees? Try again.
Ninjin shirishiri tucked in the corner like the yellow-orange-orange-yellow
sunset smeared on a first-grader's fine art project? How about
soseji slaughtered and alchemized into an eight-legged pork “octopus”?
Let's backtrack: was it even *Maimero* and her other fake pals who smirked at me
as the phrase *Itadakimasu!* exited my mouth, leaving room
for Mom's early morning creations to inhabit my tongue?

I sometimes wonder if what happened during my youth truly matters
if I can barely recall it. Rise and shine!, I demand to my burrowed memories,
but they're slain and bane. Mom hears me. Now she rises ten minutes before I do,
slapping slimy lettuce on thin ham on molding cheese on stale bread &
swirls mayo, the Kewpie brand, to liven the sandwich up some. Every good thing
decays, that's how you know it's real. You taught this to me, Mom, but not through words.
Speak to me, *Kaasan*, speak. What troubles a mother past the brink of grief?
Is it in our genes – or is it your duty –
to pass on a life-threatening hunger?

Glossary:

Bento: Japanese-style packed lunch

Maimero: My Melody (Sanrio cartoon character)

Tsuna-mayo-onigiri: tuna-mayo rice ball

Ninjin shirishiri: carrot and egg stir-fry (Okinawan dish)

Soseji: Japanese for 'sausage'

Itadakimasu: lit. "I am going to receive the lives of animals and plants for my own life."

Kaasan: mother

SATURDAY MORNING

DEE LI

Awareness is inseparable from the itch. You sit up in bed and chase after it, glancing at the clock as your fingers dig into the meat of your thigh. It's already too late to stop the day's filth from crawling into existence, and you swear that—out of the corner of your eye—ants are marching up the walls, neat lines of them. In ten seconds you will get out of bed: *10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1... 3, 2, 1...*

She's already at the breakfast table by the time you get down there, and vaguely you feel yourself pushing down the residual guilt that always accompanies a lie-in. Yet, as always, you hardly have the time to attend to your own thoughts before the weight of the household falls upon you like an anvil. Your daughter is eating while holding her phone, a carcinogen covered in greasy fingerprints that tense your scalp and concentrate your blood in your tongue until it all boils over.

—How many times have I asked you to put that fucking thing away when you're eating? It's fucking filthy. I will not have you living like a swine.

—It's away!

Maybe you'd feel worse about yelling first thing in the morning if she wasn't so damn obstinate. Or if she was even the least bit grateful that you were up practically the whole night mopping up after her. She gets to keep her hair long, and you get to deal with her cast-offs with your own cropped in severe lines around your too-wide jaw and fat face. As it were, she should be happier that you keep it all locked down so tight. Not like when she was younger—maybe it's just the way that the morning light is slanting in, but the scar above her eyebrow looks more like a canyon today.

—Finish eating. There's way too much to get done today and we don't have time to waste, got it?

—Got it.

Start with the counters, and a rag boiled for at least two minutes to kill whatever lives inside it. You almost burn yourself grabbing the thing too soon, but it's the good type of hurt that soothes even as it reddens your skin. The pleasant heat spreads up your wrist and across your shoulders, halted only by the freezing cold stare aimed squarely at your back. You're speaking before you can even turn.

—If you don't want to fucking eat, get up and start wiping these counters. Too hard for you to notice that they're filthy, eh? Too busy waiting for me to do it. Fine time you'll have when you've driven me to my grave.

—Want to eat.

You're always just a little early, or maybe it's too late. Friendly fire. You flinch as her voice comes out, garbled, around a spoonful of whatever disgusting yoghurt concoction she's been eating these days—as her voice comes out, garbled, beneath soft, warm brown eyes. She's really put those acting lessons to good use, you think, but even you know that's uncharitable. Her true crime this morning is her placidness. The lack of hurry, the smoothness of her skin and the way it remains unmoved by the degradation of its environment. You shiver in concern, eyes locked onto the contact between her bare thighs and the chair. How long has it been since you've wiped down that chair? A week? A day? She's still looking at you, and you don't know what to say. In ten seconds you'll be done with the counters: *10, 9, 8...*

—What should we have for lunch, my girl? Can you check the fridge to see if there's rice left?

—Rice for lunch.

It's some measure of relief that you can trust her with simple cooking like this. She really isn't shaping up that poorly; ten pounds too heavy, maybe, always dressed just a bit oddly, but a good girl really. You put a hand to your lower back as you sink into the couch, as much for the look of it as for the pain that you can't seem to evict from the area. You are not a believer in suffering silently.

—Can you tell me when lunch is ready?

—Lunch is ready.

As you make your way into the kitchen, something pricks at the sides of your consciousness. Something is not right, and you're already heating up just trying to find what is rotten. You think it might be your daughter's face, set in the type of mulish, self-pitying expression that is offensively out of place in the face of an unencumbered youth. What does she have to complain about? Being clothed and fed?

—What the fuck is wrong with you now? Don't give me that kind of ungrateful look. My back is killing me, did you know? Do you even care about how much I have to work to keep you clothed and fed?

—You know, I don't.

The insolence is astounding. Your fury is a choking, physical mass in your chest. Perhaps it's not a metaphor after all, but a tumor—the kind that would make you cough up blood, wads of it staining white handkerchiefs. You might pass out then, delicately, murmuring to the EMTs that it wasn't your daughter's fault after all, it was your own for being such a bad mother. Your daughter would weep, tomato-faced and ugly, and beg upon her knees to keep you breathing. Something of that martyred spirit seems to linger with you, clearing up your sinuses, giving you strength and conviction.

—Then you really must be stupid. Take this, and learn.

Your palm stings where the contact was made; your face stings where the angry sweat has invaded the tears in your skin; your ears sting hearing that familiar sound ring out in the dead silence. You shouldn't have done that. You really shouldn't have.

—Learn? Learn what?

In ten seconds. In twenty seconds. In—how much time do you need? How many replays of this scene are you going to need to finally banish it? *10... 10...10...*

But her face is still there. Broad and tomato-red, ugly with tears. You fear prophecy. You fear a metaphor made flesh. The question, growing increasingly unanswered, seems to pulse in the scant few inches of air between the two of you. You wonder, briefly, if the food hasn't gotten cold in all this time. What might have settled across its surface, crawled over the plates.

—Learn what a mother's love means. I have to teach you, correct you. I can't always be gentle for you.

—Gentle. I. You...

Perhaps she is too furious to speak. Perhaps she, too, has something invisible and imaginary choking her. You shouldn't have done that. But now you are sitting down to eat, face composed again. You are putting the best vegetables over her rice. You are clearing the table, leaving her to the dishes in silence. You are decamping back to the couch. Perhaps in ten seconds you will fall asleep, then wake up after this day, too, has been forgotten. *10... 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2...*

Dreams can approach reality. Your back aches all the worse for its brief horizontal respite. You do not want to, but you must prod the wound you have created, check if the injured limb can again bear weight. The day, after all, must go on.

—My girl? Can you bring me some water to drink?

—Bring some water.

Terse maybe, but it seems that things have smoothed over enough to allow you both to get the rest of your work done. A quick catalogue: the sun has gone down enough that you can begin working in the garden. She can look after the windows, due for their seasonal clean. Then there's the matter of dinner.

—Windows, dinner. You in the garden. Water to drink.

She's quick enough on the uptake, that one. You suppose you can spare a moment for pride, appreciation of her resiliency and her pragmatic nature. She got that from you, the ability to see the big picture.

—Teach you, correct you. Gentle for you. Take this, and learn. And learn. The big picture. What might have settled on its surface? Crawled, tomato-faced and ugly, and beg upon her knees?

It's always a good sign when she gets chatty after an incident. You take her tacit forgiveness as fuel for the rest of the day, something to get through the intensely physical labour of the garden. You always dread getting started, but if you were to tell the truth, you would say that it gives you an almost maternal pleasure to see your beans, your cucumbers, your tomatoes and squash and peppers growing so straight and proud. Your daughter is nearing maturation, and you've increasingly noticed the need for another such project to keep you fulfilled as you age. Not to mention the price of groceries these days! It blows you nearly clean off your feet just to pop to the store for potatoes and carrots. There's something about root vegetables that eludes your ability to grow. You feel almost like the child in the parable, always itching to pull them up to see how they are bearing fruit. No, the less contact with the dirt the better. It makes you mildly ill and insatiably itchy to even imagine digging something straight out of the dirt and cooking it for your family, knowing that it had just been encrusted with the offal of the earth. Better to take the smooth yellow illusion of store potatoes, and anyways you always have you or the girl wash them with.

—Baking soda? Windows?

—Yes, baking soda for the window frames, to keep them white. The screens should be fine with whatever soap you have on hand. This will all be useful for you when you have your own home and your own family in the future.

—The illusion of the future. Own home, own family. Own. Learn what a mother's love means. Prod the wound you have created. Resiliency. Injured limb. It blows you nearly clean off your feet. Take this, and learn. Water to drink. Potatoes and carrots. Squash. The child. Wash them with the offal of the earth, see how they are bearing fruit. In ten seconds, you will. *10, 9, 8, 7, 5, 6, 2, 1, 4, 10. 10. 10.*

You lose track of what she is saying as she finishes up the window nearest to you and decamps elsewhere. There is significantly less weeding to be done than you expected, which should allow you to head in and get started on dinner before she's finished with whatever windows she can reach. You shrug off the opportunistic itch, grown less powerful for its long term residence between your shoulder blades, at the thought of the windows that neither of you can reach. Sometimes it's better not to look too closely.

—What should we have for dinner, my girl?

—Water to drink. Potatoes and carrots. Squash. Growing so straight and proud.

A skillet hash, then. Perhaps a fresh smashed cucumber salad on the side, to lighten up all those heavy flavours. You wonder if there's still bacon left in the fridge, or even sausage—disgusting as it really was. Nobody remembered to defrost meat after all the commotion of lunchtime, and your back aches far too much from crouching all this time to tangle with the task of processing something frozen into something quick to cook. You take a critical eye over the last remaining quadrant of your garden, counting the weeds that were yet to be plucked. *1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6...*

Dusk in the summer is a gift. After a shower and a good meal, you want nothing more than to open the bedroom windows and luxuriate in the silky air, but there is more to be done. Always more to be done. What you really need is to give the floors their nightly sweep, and you wonder if your daughter would be amenable to taking over for a few rooms. Young people, you know, are universally sensitive and volatile these days, and she has already exceeded your expectations with the windows this afternoon. You always fear her moods, how easily they can derail the delicate household cogs upon which your sanity rests. But

—There is more to be done. Always more to be done. The opportunistic itch. Your back aches all the worse. The insolence is astounding. A quick catalogue: you're always just a little early, or maybe it's too late. Friendly fire. Do you even care? Perhaps you are too furious to speak. Dreams can approach reality. In ten seconds you will fall asleep.

A gift.

10.

9.

8.

7.

6.

5.

4.

3.

2.

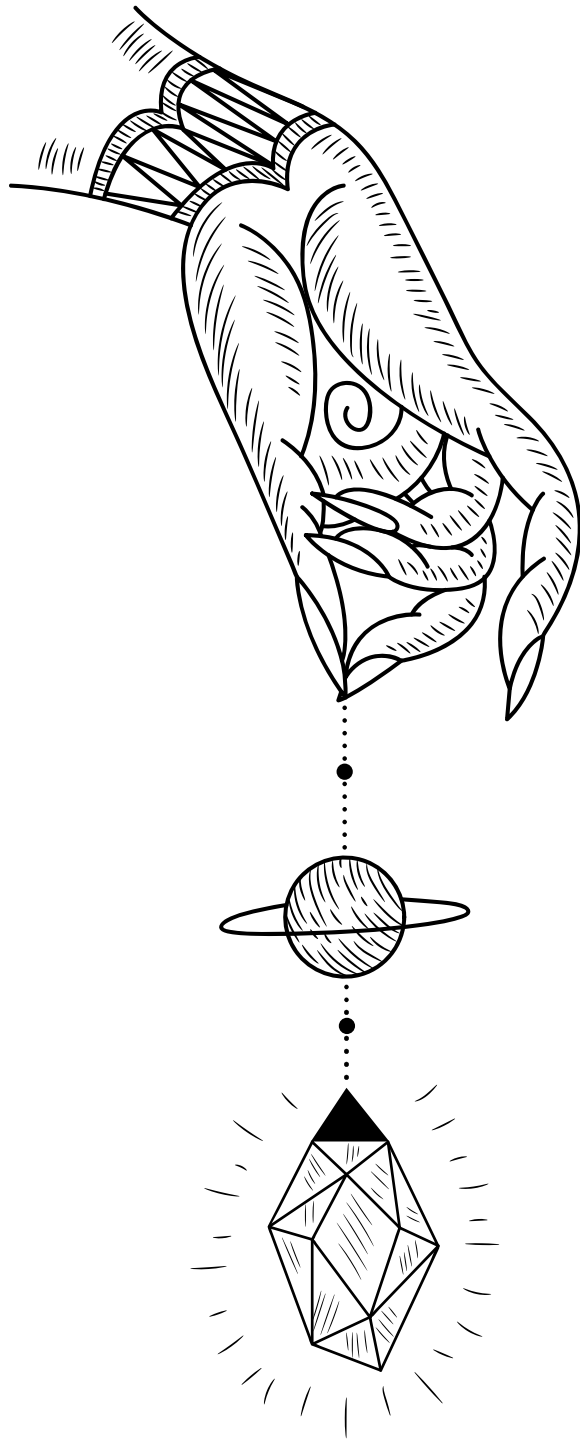
1.

LUTEAL PHASE DELIRIUM

IVANA KALAŠ

I read my menstrual blood in the toilet
like coffee grounds
turned over onto a plate
a refugee flow
photograph it
practice divination
want to share it but won't

I'm gathering my body
the sediment remains
scattered over different continents
sharp coarse material
they call diaspora
I call it
une seance de corps



TAKE ALL OF ME
EVA LYNCH-COMER

after Billie Holiday

use my bones as sidewalk chalk
crack my pelvis on the pavement
clean your teeth with the shards

use my heartstrings as twine
to bind the hands and feet
of your victims

mix my saliva with my tears to concoct
the chloroform you will use to stopper
the girls' screams

when you are done take my braids
mop up the evidence
you've left behind

wield my fingers to write your side
of the story, my voice as a megaphone
to proclaim your innocence

the parts of me
you left behind
need constant tending

my voice hides in my throat
I must rinse my mouth with ocean water
then drink peppermint tea to speak

I chew garlic and ginger to quell stomach pains
spray my hair with rose water or it will not grow
soothe my bones with a cinnamon bath

I carry sea water in a plastic bottle
peppermint tea in a thermos
season my food with only garlic and ginger

I sing to my bones during bathroom breaks
bathe in cinnamon during lunch
my damp hair always smells of roses

the parts of me that you left behind
need constant tending
how long must I care for them?

SPARROW BLOOD AND DUST

EVA LYNCH-COMER

I twist off a sparrow's head
drink the blood from its small body
hold it in the pocket of my mouth
spit it out on your face

Peel bark off a tree
with my bare fingers
lick the surface of the bark
lick it soft

Furrow into dirt
until my skin melts into
sparrow blood and dust

When I am done
I wash myself
in the clear stream
but mud clogs my lashes
and the taste of bark lingers
on the roof of my mouth

I cannot believe I never broke
your skin with my teeth
never tasted your blood
held the salt on my tongue
no, I laid myself in your hands

Now sparrow's blood
stains your skin
the next time
you try to capture another
your flesh will burn
and she will run



FUCK CANCER SEASON

JODIE OAKES

I'm mad at my body
(And the moon and the planets)
So susceptible to your Mars like rage
That a single fuck
Made it bleed for days

I'm no longer Venus in ashes
I want to be Saturn with
so many rings I
Slice your hand
Like an onion
When you reach for me

Instead, I spew constellations
Say 'fuck cancer season'
I'm sick of seeing memes
Of Paris Hilton crying
I have the urge
To burn every zodiac house
To the ground

My restlessness split
Into a billion atoms
That no James Webb
Telescope could find
and bind together
A moving image
Of chaos,
Of kill or be killed

You don't know
How beautiful you are
Holly says
I'm tired of sleeping
Next to my dog I reply
I want to call the witch
And ask her who will love me

I write your name
On a scrap of paper
And push it beneath the pillow
but even in dreams
you are a half-formed thing

This is not my town
To gossip about
Someone scrawls
In an empty window

My horoscope says
I'm having a month
Of paranoia
As I drag the dead weight
Of Gemini season with me

GRIEF

PUNAM

I fold grief neatly and put it away
promising myself, I'll deal with it one day

but like unsolicited pamphlets that arrive with the newspaper
it sits there on the table, waiting like a waif

it flutters like a moth trying to nestle in my heart
feeding on the rotting feelings of guilt and loss

bedraggled sadness follows me like a pup
baying at moonlight bleeding through the skylight

With a sigh I fold grief neatly and put it away
promising myself, I'll deal with it one day.

HOW TO SURVIVE YOUR PARTNER'S APOCALYPSE **RIVER SNOWDROP**

grief has collapsed us like a lung like a truck like a squashed bug and we're the remnants on the wall. i am not at all prepared for this. i am not at all okay. we spend our day in separate rooms feeling the same thing and testing who will break first who will search the kitchen for food who will use the mirror in the hall and crawl five minutes to the shop and back just for a snack just for a snatched second of joy to hand the other person like happiness can be found in a galaxy ripple. sometimes it's subtle: the sadness sits on the opposite end of the sofa and we go for it take in big laughs really gulp them down like rick and morty will save our life it's the only thing the only thing and we're grinning grinning from ear to ear. we might cheer up enough for a home-cooked meal and steal twenty minutes of peace from the contents of the ketchup on our plates or the sweetcorn in our bowls. i'll hold your hand and get very quiet. we wait for the riot to come and it does come. sometimes it's like we're back to square one. inviting grief to the table. i know they will leave when they're good and able. the guilt i feel for wishing for it and the futility of asking them to stay.



TO THE LAST DAYS ON DIALYSIS

M. A. DUBBS

It hurts to sit in these stiff
wood chairs, cold pleather chafing
my thighs as I contortion
my spine into these arm rests.
It's hard to rest when everything is green:
bile fluorescent lights retching onto coarse
white sheets and kitschy portraits of prairie
landscapes. The quiet hum of daytime TV
is our pacemaker, split between commercials
peddling shit like Allegra
when you haven't been outside in months
and I don't think you can get allergies
from artificial plants.
But perhaps latex gloves and IV bags
and those orange syringe tips are your pollen?

The seasons defrost in our brains until our grey
matter pours out like over-
cooked ground beef.
I don't know how you can stand to sleep
in this incubator, your entire life squeezed
into an aquarium. The smell of saline
and hand sanitizer burns into our flesh,
every sense simultaneously under
and overwhelmed.

We know that this is borrowed time, crushing
flesh into our mold.
I know that it will spill out
and I will drown
in the flood of you.
But right now you are warm and present.
so if you can ignore the pain in your bones.
I can ignore this one in my heart.

THE DEATH OF A MOURNING DOVE

M. A. DUBBS

Since this morning she has sat
in my mouth
filling my cheeks
with her wings,
talons resting
on my hot tongue.
Her down feathers are drenched,
Heavy from my saliva.
She shifts from leg to leg,
tail rubbing my uvula raw.

She pecks at the back of my teeth
to open my mouth,
but I resist her.
I know that she will scream
the moment I part my lips.
She nibbles at my gums
and I taste copper.
I want to swallow but I know
I will swallow her whole
in one large gulp.

She stomps in my mouth
and her breast swells,
expanding my cheeks wide
until I feel I could burst.
I part my lips
and she cries out:
Oo-wah-hooo, hoo-hoo.

The song of my childhood.
The song of late summer nights
and rainy spring mornings,
a cool day in Indiana,
my last day with you.



HEATWAVE

JODIE OAKES

What starts as a murmur on the skin
Quickly becomes a forest fire
We sleep in soaking fits
Of murderous rages
The golden stones of walls fall
And our lives seem to topple with it
Killing the neighbor's cat.
Everything is already dead
not from the fist of snow
but from the thick black heat
that blots out reason
tin turns to flame
and the hour takes one last gulping
breath of desperation
it's my favorite season I say
the only one
where shot nerves make sense
under the withering stare of the sun
I try to make light
Of this misery
The sky bleached
From too much thunder
I understand this world
That says please please please
Don't let the roof of night cave in
I mockup gauzy fantasies
Of flowers and cocktails on the lawn
But immediately step in dog shit
The dust wind carries our parasol
Into the rose bush
Tearing the fabric
as if my whole soul
Was made of paper
I cannot fend them off
The flies that come for our fruit
The weeds that grab with greedy hands
Like the child I didn't want.
The violas are too fragile
And the clouds come too quick
I cannot orchestrate this dance
In a place where it's possible
To drown on land

LUCKY BLANKETS

LISA PERKINS

We called her Lucky Blankets on a street where nicknames were religion. She rose to it like Hestia to a loom. One crosshatch knit to one start at a time. Powder pink for the baby at 21 who grew up and chased America. All blues to the brood on the corner, left bare by a bastard of men. Pearl white for the actress at number 4, found like a stillborn whisper on a folded sea of silk.

Lucky had a lady friend who moved in one Good Friday, and soon after that a stray dog. The gate holders threaded tongues when they saw ... 'That's an unholy thing to be'
I thought the devil ran with Alsatians until I was thirteen.

The day our window cracked open in grief she appeared. All pastry and papers in celestial scream. The Star! The Sun! News of the World! Basting the room with apple sauce and other-worldly wonders. And I wondered if her rescue would miss her. But wanting luck to never leave, questions settled between my teeth.

I followed her hands traffic, names slipping through needlework scars and unribboned the promised gift. Yellow for the girl with ghosts in her eyes. The window creaked behind its veil, a splintered jaw swinging wide open.

First published by Green Ink Poetry

THE VASE

LYNN WHITE

The kitchen looked tired and worn
like my mother did,
the last time I saw her there.
I felt no nostalgia for it.
It was not my childhood kitchen.
It held no special memories,
I thought.
And then,
I saw the vase on the counter top.
My friend found it on the Kings Road.
Bought it and brought it home.
I'd asked her to buy me something,
a souvenir of swinging London.
She bought the vase.
I never liked it much.
Dark and bulbous,
it spent most of its time at my mother's,
though she didn't like it much either.
Then time stole it away,
took it from my memory,
erased it.
And now,
here it is again, sharp as ever
bringing the past home
as it stands empty
on the counter top.
It seems that her death
invested in it a poignancy
that it had not known before.

I took it home with me.

First published in Event Horizon, Issue 2, December 2017

WHERE THE LOST CHILDREN GO

LYNN WHITE

My mother told me that
my sister has gone to Never Never Land.
It's where the lost children go,
those who don't find their way home
and those who fade away and die
like the wild flowers I pick for the house.
My mother told me that
they stay children forever
and can play all day long.
It sounds like fun there
but my mother says
she will never let me go.
She told me the children there will grow wings
and become angels.
I think that when my sister gets her wings
she will fly back home.
My mother says no
but I shall wait.

First published by Mollyhouse, January 2021



INTERVIEW WITH
Emma Conally-Barklem



INTRODUCE YOURSELF; WHEN DID YOU BEGIN WRITING? WHEN AND WHY DID YOU DECIDE YOU WANTED TO SHARE YOUR WORK WITH OTHERS?

I have always written but I started writing more in my twenties in a notebook given to me by my first boyfriend. I stopped writing when I started yoga as I could only write when I was sad. My mum was given a journal by my aunt when she was in her final hospice. She managed one entry in shaky pencil, when she died I promised her I would keep the journal for her. It became an outpouring of grief from day one until about two years afterwards so it really became a chronicle of acute grief. I realised in writing it that I had also described things which might help other people so then I started to draft it again with a view to having it published. The pandemic happened, everything stopped and I came face to face with my grief. I joined Instagram in 2020 and started connecting with both the grief and poetry communities. I started doing prompts and found a grief therapist. After my first session, I wrote a poem, 'Lodged in my Throat' which I knew was more personal than anything I had written previously. I knew from my connections that sharing my work could help other people through grief and mental health challenges.

WHERE DO YOUR INSPIRATIONS COME FROM? ARE THEY MUSICAL, LITERARY, EKPHRASTIC OR ALL THREE?

My inspiration for writing is my mother. She had seen my natural aptitude for reading and writing from when I was a child and she nurtured it through trips to the library, reading and writing together. She was an artist and creative so really placed a value on those aspects where other people maybe didn't. I went on to complete degrees in literature and was a lecturer for thirteen years. The original dream was to be a writer so I feel I have come full circle with this. I am an empath and visual so I am influenced by nature, art, the yoga journey, my travels, the human condition, my upbringing in Bronte country and probably everything I have read.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR WRITING PROCESS?

Swift! I write quickly which was something I only realised through talking to other poets about their process. I have moments of inspiration where I have to write things down immediately. If I am writing a collection, I usually write three poems in one sitting when I feel immersed. I like to write in a notebook initially, then I refine it on the laptop, usually every time I come back to it. Now that I have my memoir and two collections to be published, I will spend time editing and structuring. I write best in the winter months when I am in an introspective and creative space.

WITH REGARDS TO THIS ISSUE, WHAT DO THE THEMES OF LOVE AND LOSS MEAN TO YOU? IS IT POSSIBLE TO HAVE ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER?

The theme for this issue really resonated as the subtitle to my memoir is 'Love, loss & Yoga'. I feel they are two sides to the same coin. The sad truth is we inevitably lose everything over time but the love remains and we can hold on to this.

WHAT ROLE DOES THE PRACTICE OF YOGA PLAY IN YOUR LIFE? MANY TURN TO IT FOR PEACE AND BALANCE, WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU?

Yoga is central to my existence and has been for the last twenty years. I am an eight limb yogi who endeavours to respect and live by the eight limbs as described in The Yoga Sutras. They consist of how you deal with yourself and the world around you, breath & movement, focus, drawing inside & meditation and seeking peace in every present moment. Yoga is a holistic pathway towards peace and the guiding light of my life. It is difficult but most things worth having such as peace usually are.

WHAT ROLE DOES THE PRACTICE OF YOGA PLAY IN YOUR LIFE? MANY TURN TO IT FOR PEACE AND BALANCE, WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU?

I started my channel in 2017, it is a labour of love to help others feel better through yoga. There are playlists ranging from 5 minutes to 60 minutes long covering all styles of yoga as well as therapeutic focus points. My motive is always to help people. I know what it feels like to have back pain, feel stiff, anxious and stressed which is why I have to practice. Yoga is designed for everybody so I focus on how to enable peoples' practice through giving them options and the choice of whether to practice in a chair or on a mat. I am grateful for all the gifts yoga has brought my way so I hope to pass on what I learnt over the years and inspire people to live their best lives now.

YOU OFTEN WRITE ABOUT YOUR MOTHER, WOULD YOU MIND SHARING WITH US WHY SHE IS SUCH A MUSE AND INSPIRATION FOR YOU?

My mother and my grandma are the only family members I was very close to and unfortunately they both died. We were very close knit so it was a huge loss for me, First in 2012 then in 2018. My mother is my inspiration because without her I wouldn't be a writer. I started writing again after she died. I would give everything to have her back and not be a writer but this is the reality. She will always be a part of my life, and I hope I have inherited her compassion and her kindness.

BASED ON YOUR EXPERIENCE, WHAT WOULD YOU RECOMMEND TO OTHERS WHO ARE ON A JOURNEY OF GRIEF?

It is easy to say things in hindsight. I ran away from my grief for a year and that came back to bite me. I found that part of this was because we don't have healthy grief processes encoded into society. Death is outsourced and swept away before we can even begin to absorb the loss. To be told to be strong, or that time will heal, or any sentence beginning with 'At least' is not helpful. I would recommend to griever's to go easy on themselves. Honour the very natural emotions which arise and feel them. If family and friends are not supportive then reach out to a grief community or grief workers. Try my 'Yoga for Grief' playlist on my channel which addresses emotional fatigue, how to deal with anger and much more. Asking for help takes courage but vulnerability is strength. I will always be grateful to the online grief community for normalising going to therapy. I needed more support and it was the best thing I could have done.

WHAT ARE YOUR WRITING/PUBLISHING GOALS FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE?

My debut chapbook 'The Ridings' will be published by Bent Key Publishing in March 2023 so I will be taking time to edit and order the collection in the next few months. The grief and yoga memoir, 'You Can't Hug a Butterfly: Love, loss & Yoga' will be published by QuillKeepers press in 2024 so I will be adding a section to this on therapy and mental health, kind of a postscript to the memoir and where I am now. I will go through what will be the eighth draft for typos and stylistic alterations. I am currently submitting my chapbook, 'Hymns from the Sisters' based on my summer residency at The Bronte Parsonage Museum. I also have a pandemic collection called 'Car Office' and a yoga poetry full collection in the pipeline so plenty is coming up!

HELLEBORE MOTHER LETTER
EMMA CONALLY-BARKLEM

Dear M,

My heart holds a hellebore/paroxysm of holding/clear an expansive love/born now on
thermals of air-welded atmosphere/You can't be contained/By the hooks of words/ Or
rococo sorrow/Impassive you soar/ Draw me in with signs and wonders/ An egret's
taciturn turning amongst reed beds/The silence I find you in/ Cages memories in veins,

Love E



PERSIAN NIGHT

ENRICO BARIGAZZI

The stars are carving
their stanzas on the surface
of the sky
the supreme Ferdowsi's
poetry has painted the background
where the beauty is wound up
learning what life has decided to teach her
through joy and pain;
conquer and loss are two stitches
on the two extremities of the same thread
which is crochet with other ones
into the tangled matter of feelings
enlivening human nature

everything is fading away
slowly through the lines
of ancient pages

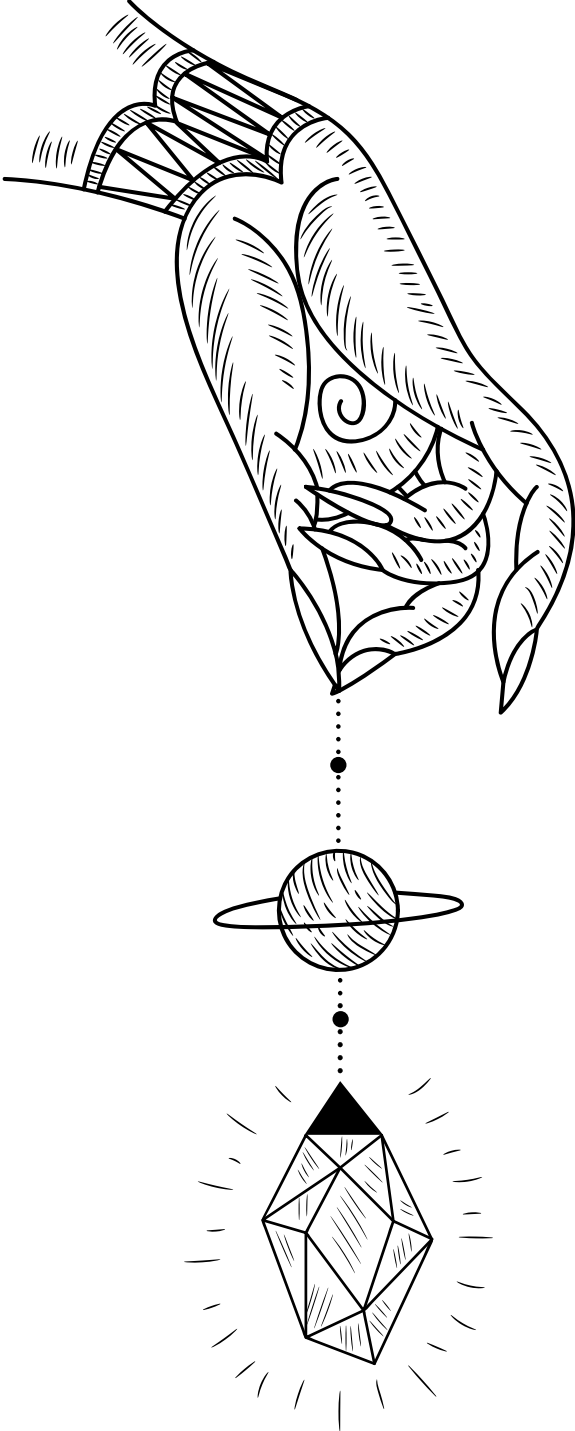
a mother and his deceased son
are vanishing into the scroll
where they have been immortalised
and their stories have been narrated
around the fire of generations for decades
lost in a timeless Persian night.

BIRDSONG AUBADE

TYLER HURULA

Forgetting is a desperate songbird
screeching in the branches
begging for a different
beginning.

One where the first song
is not a chorus of raised
voices muffled inside a womb
refuge. One without bruises.
She and I are both longing
for a misremembered
middle, searching
for something softer.
Maybe a lullaby. We ache
to compose a silk symphony
un-reliant on our past—
to trill our own unspoiled end.



MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS

Alexis Mitchell (she/her) is an English teacher, author, and poet from New York. She began her writing journey at eight years old—from diaries with a lock and key to journals or random scribbles, writing has remained at the core of her existence. As of 2022, she has published 4 poetry collections: *I Write, Therefore I Am*, *I Write Therefore I Am: Exposed*, *Hope Chest*, and *The Attic* (<https://linktr.ee/alexispmitchell>). Aside from teaching and writing, Alexis Mitchell can be found with her nose in a book or spending time with friends and family. To connect with the author, Alexis Mitchell can be found on Instagram @_lexmwrites.

Bartholomew Barker is one of the organizers of Living Poetry, a collection of poets and poetry lovers in the Triangle region of North Carolina. His first poetry collection, *Wednesday Night Regular*, written in and about strip clubs, was published in 2013. His second, *Milkshakes and Chilidogs*, a chapbook of food inspired poetry was served in 2017. He was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2021. Born and raised in Ohio, studied in Chicago, he worked in Connecticut for nearly twenty years before moving to Hillsborough where he makes money as a computer programmer to fund his poetry habit. www.bartbarkerpoet.com.

Carella Keil is a poet and digital artist who splits her time between the ethereal world of dreams, and Toronto, Canada, depending on the weather. Her work involves themes of mental health, nature and sexuality, often in a surrealist tone. Carella is the recipient of the Stanley Fefferman Prize in Creative Writing (2006) and 2nd place winner in the Open Minds Quarterly BrainStorm Poetry Contest (2017). Recently, she has been published in *OMQ*, *Margins Magazine*, *Wrongdoing Magazine* and *Shuf Poetry*. Forthcoming publications include *Paddler Press*, *Myth & Lore*, *Fragmented Voices*, *Querencia Press* and *Stripes Literary Magazine*.

Chloe Adams (she/her) is a poet and elementary school educator residing in the Bay Area of California. She writes creative nonfiction about mental health, navigating romance, and exploring familial identity. You can connect with her at @chloesiamwrites on Instagram.

Dee Li (she/they) is a poet and literary scholar living and working on Turtle Island. Their work centres on themes of transnational identity, queerness, mental illness, and gender, and has been published online since 2018.

Duna Torres Martín (she/her, pen name **Duna Haller**) is a poet, writer, collagist and musician from Madrid, Spain. She has two poetry books out, *'Limbo'* (Bottlecap Press) and *'Desierto'* (Reflector Libros), as well as several poems and short stories published in various anthologies and zines, including *'99% Chance of Magic: Stories of Strength and Hope for Transgender Kids'* (Heartspark Press). Her work usually deals with mental & physical health themes, LGBT+ issues, memory and relationships, and she's always inclined and curious towards collaborative work. You can see more of her work and contact her at her website: <https://dunahaller.pb.studio/> or at Instagram @dunahaller.

Ellen Clayton (she/her) is a poet from Suffolk, England, where she lives with her husband and three young children. Her poetry has been published in various online and print publications, including *Capsule Stories*, *Nightingale & Sparrow* and *Anti-Heroin Chic*. Her debut chapbook, *Home Baked*, was published in April 2022 by Bent Key Publishing. More of her work can be found on Instagram @ellen_writes_poems.

Elyse Welles is a writer, witch and wanderer, sharing her time between Greece's ancient temples, the woods of Pennsylvania, and wherever Spirit takes her next. She has been published in *Sunflower Journal*, *Yellow Arrow Journal*, and *Gypsophila Magazine*, among others. Her novel, *"Witch on the Juniata River"*, is forthcoming from *Running Wild Press*. She cohosts the *Magick Kitchen Podcast* and teaches *Spirit-first living* online. Read & learn more at seekingnumina.com or her social media, @seekingnumina.

Emily Mew is a poet, mother, therapist and academic publisher living in Bristol, UK. Emily loves experimenting with a range of poetry styles and forms, and often returns to themes of motherhood, nature and healing. She can be found on Instagram as @emewpoetry.

MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS

Emma Conally-Barklem is a yogi, writer and poet based in North Yorkshire, England. She writes on nature, mental health, grief, social justice, family and wellbeing. Her published poetry includes: 'Home Fires' Hestia (hearth & home) Issue III, 'Give Us A Twirl!', 'Vespertine' Cassandra Issue V, 'Seducing the Lion's Heart', 'Hellebore Mother Letter', Tahmina Issue VII Free Verse Revolution Literary Magazine, 'No Coward Soul Am I' Black In White Community Collection Anthology, 'Lodged In My Throat' Winter Issue #9 2021 Please See Me Online Literary Journal, 'Tranquil', 'Vespertine' Aurum Journal, 'Cargo', 'When The Clouds Break', 'Out Of Place', Sunday Mornings At The River Spring 2022 Anthology, 'Vine Terrace (East)' Ey Up! Bent Key Publishing Summer Anthology 2022 'Elusive Muse', 'Sinful', 'Dashing', Tipping the Scales Literary Journal Spring 2022, 'Spring Haiku' Small Leaf Press and 'Circe' Super Present Magazine Summer Issue 2022. Her first collection, 'The Ridings' has been accepted for traditional chapbook publication by Bent Key Publishing in March 2023. Her yoga and grief memoir, 'You Can't Hug A Butterfly: Love, Loss & Yoga' has been accepted for traditional publication by QuillKeepers Press in 2024.

Enrico Barigazzi was born in Venice, Italy. He has always had a deep interest for literature since he was a child and this spurred him to pursue classical studies, graduating in political science from the University of Padua in 2005. He began writing when he was 34 years old, relatively late. He usually writes in both Italian and English. He has published two poetry books in Italian: *Il colore delle parole* published in 2017 for Irda Edizioni, and *Parole scomparse* issued in 2019 for Irda Edizioni. Some of his poems have been published by different anthologies – *Alidicarta.it*, *Clubpoetico.it* and *Scrivere.info*-. As far as his work in English is concerned it can be found on the English poetry site *Allpoetry.com*. His contribution for the magazine *Free Verse Revolution* is his first publication in an English literary magazine.

Eva Lynch-Comer (she/her) is an Afro-Latina poet with Costa Rican ancestry. She is pursuing her MFA in poetry at Hollins University and she holds a B.A. in Creative Writing from Hamilton College. Her work has appeared in *Capsule Stories*, *Tilted House Review*, *Peach Velvet Magazine*, and *Nightingale & Sparrow*, among others. She enjoys singing, journaling, and drinking tea. You can find more of Eva's work at <https://evalynchcomer.weebly.com> and follow her on instagram @evalynch321.

Evyenia Downey (she/her) is a nonfiction writer and poet from Toronto, Canada. She holds an MFA in creative nonfiction from the University of King's College Halifax. She writes about relationships, identity, and mental illness. Find her on Instagram @evyeniadowney.

Hasib Iftekhhar (he/him) is a poet and novelist currently based in Toronto, Canada. Working towards his debut novel, his previous publishing credits are with Canadian literary magazines and Anthology collections. He loves to spend time with family, read, and gauge around for values and sentiments or a lack thereof. In a turning world, he seeks comfort in churning out matters to metaphors and lyrics and hence, persuades. Instagram handle: Hasib Iftekhhar.

Howard Young is a poet and writer from East Sussex. He is the author of the 2022 collection "To Know The Way Back" published by Sunday Mornings At The River Press, and he has contributed to many other publications and anthologies in recent years. He lives in a small house near the sea with his wife, children and too many typewriters. He can be found on Instagram @brighton_typewriter_poet.

Ingrid Wilson is a poet, author and publisher via her own publishing house, Experiments in Fiction, which began as a blog (<https://experimentsinfiction.com/>) in March 2020. Her most recent publication is her first solo poetry collection, *40 Poems at 40*, which is available from Amazon. She has also published an anthology, *The Anthropocene Hymnal*, in July 2021. Her poetry has been widely published both online and in print, and she was nominated for *Spillwords Author of the Year 2022*. At present she is working on poetry projects with several talented authors, and is always on the lookout for new proposals. She combines her writing and publishing with advocacy work for sufferers of PMDD, a poorly-understood but common and devastating premenstrual health condition.

Ivana Kalaš is a Bosnian-Dutch multilingual poet, writer, and translator living in Amsterdam. Among the topics she explores are loss, belonging, and positionality. Her work has previously appeared in *Blood Moon POETRY* and on *baghawat.com* of which she is a co-editor in chief. Currently, she is writing a novel about a hoarder whose belongings come crashing down on her.

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Jaya Avendel is a word witch from the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, passionate about life where it intersects with writing and the dreamscapes lost in between. She shares writing tips, poetry, and prose at her creative site, Nin Chronicles.

Jodie Oakes (she/her) is a poet living between a rusty transit van and a rural village in Bulgaria. After taking an unplanned break from creative work over the last few years, she is back to explore modern themes of quiet rage, survivorship, and rebirth. Her work has previously been published in Verum Literary Press, Querencia Press, Emerge Literary Journal, Fire, Moodswing, The Global Tapestry Journal, Maybles Labels, and various anthologies. She is currently working on her second chapbook.

John de Gruyther is a freelance writer, author and published poet. He is currently working on his first novel for children. You can find more about John's work at his website www.theworldoutsidethewindow.com.

Jonathan Chan is a writer and editor of poems and essays. Born in New York to a Malaysian father and South Korean mother, he was raised in Singapore and educated at Cambridge and Yale Universities. He is the author of the poetry collection going home (Landmark, 2022). He has recently been moved by the work of Kevin Young, R. F. Kuang, and Alfian Sa'at. More of his writing can be found at jonbcy@wordpress.com and on Instagram at @fivefoundings.

kfarrell is an artist living in British Columbia, Canada. His oil paintings and fine ink works hang in galleries and private collections, his illustration work known as gone.farrell has been published in Canada and the US. His Instagram is @gone.farrell.

Kate MacAlister is a Writer, Social Justice Witch and medical student Kate MacAlister discovered the art of poetry as a healing ritual many years ago. Her poems conjure spell-binding images of intricate inner worlds and the struggles in our contorted society. She tells stories inspired by her work that have been published in various online literary journals and printed anthologies. Whether it is her work in the hospital or fighting the patriarchy: above all these are stories about human connection and the dreams of revolution. Instagram: @kissed.by_fire.

Lisa Perkins (she/her) is a published poet and mother to three little muses from Dublin, Ireland. Her work has been featured in various print and digital zines and anthologies. Poetry is her favourite place to disappear and be found in, as both a release and hold on our shared stories. Her work hangs out on Instagram dressed in wordplay and lyrical narrative, @lisaperks.

Lori Zybala is passionate about intertwining the musing of the mind, related to human existence, nature and the love of language. Poetry is her natural extension, a paper and pencil union of the conscious and subconscious mind joining together, an atmospheric flow. Originally from Canada, works in the world of academia, and is now based in Ontario. When not writing she can be found hiking in nature, reading poetry and indulging in a great cup of coffee.

Lynn White lives in north Wales. Her work is influenced by issues of social justice and events, places and people she has known or imagined. She is especially interested in exploring the boundaries of dream, fantasy and reality. She was shortlisted in the Theatre Cloud 'War Poetry for Today' competition and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and a Rhysling Award. Find Lynn at: <https://lynnwhitepoetry.blogspot.com> and <https://www.facebook.com/Lynn-White-Poetry-1603675983213077/>.

M. A. Dubbs (she/her) is an award-winning Mexican-American and LGBT+ writer from Indiana. Over the past decade her writing has been published in journals, anthologies, and zines across the globe. You can find more of her work at her website melindadubbs.wordpress.com or on Instagram www.instagram.com/madubbspoetry.

Maggie Kaprielian (she/her) is a seventeen year old from Maryland. She is an Editor in Chief for the Erewhon Literary Arts Magazine and president of Potomac's chapter of the Maryland Teen Writers Association. She attended Susquehanna University's Summer Poetry Workshops in 2021 and 2022. Find her on Instagram @maggiekaprielian_.

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Olivia Snowdrop (she/they) is a queer non-binary poet from Manchester, UK. They are the author of two self-published poetry books: Snowdrop, and their latest collection, ANTS IN A JAM JAR. Olivia is also active on Instagram as @oliviasnowdrop (when such activity isn't detrimental to her mental health!) and has been previously published in Honeyfire Literary Magazine and Pulp Poets Press.

Priti Tiwari (she/her) is an Indian immigrant residing in the U.S.A with her husband and two children. She is a teacher by profession and a writer by passion. She truly believes that reading and writing makes us better human beings. To write and read good writing brings her immense joy. She is working towards publishing her debut poetry collection. She loves tea and may be suffering from a case of tepidophobia! Instagram: @pri_ti_wari.

Punam is a sailor's wife and mother of two teenagers. She resides in Delhi. She is a former high school teacher, still in touch with her students. She enjoys writing poems both in English and Hindi. Besides reading and writing, she loves cooking and baking.

Rachel Dickens is a mother, poet, graphic designer, and illustrator who operates under the guise of @lollysnow on Instagram. She has been published in two poetry anthologies: Dispatches from New Motherhood by Mothership writers and Songs of Love and Strength by the Mum Poem Press. She also features in zines: Dear 2021 project, The6press and Gypsophilia.

R S Kendle (she/her) is a poet and writer from the north east of Scotland. She holds a BA Honours in English Literature and Politics from the University Of Strathclyde. Her work has been published in Feminist Space Camp, The Survivor Zine, and Trigger Warning. She can be found on Instagram @rskendle.

Robin L Harvey finished her post-degree graduate certificate in creative writing at Toronto's Humber School for Writers in 2021. She lives in Toronto near a beautiful, large park with her son, who has graduated from OCADU and is a painter. Besides her son, she loves anything from Star Trek, weird vintage clothes and her rowing machine. Harvey also covers pop culture and she is the arts critic for a website called notthepublicbroadcaster.com.

Sammi Yamashiro is a Japanese and Black-American writer from Okinawa, Japan. She has been an avid poetry reader since 2015 and began writing her own work two years later. She is the author of "The Peach Pit Mask". Her poems have appeared in The Rising Phoenix Review, Calla Press, Sunday Mornings at the River, and others. Read her work on Instagram and Pinterest (@sammiyamashiro) and join her mailing list by visiting sammiyamashiro.com.

Sanket Mhatre has been featured at Kala Ghoda Arts Festival, Poets Translating Poets, Goa Arts & Literature Festival, Jaipur Literature Festival, Vagdevi Litfest and Glass House Poetry Festival. His first book of cross-translated poems, The Coordinates Of Us won the prestigious Raza Foundation Grant after being shortlisted at IWrite2020 at Jaipur Literature Festival. Sanket's poems have appeared in multiple anthologies such as Shape Of A Poem, The Well Earned, Home Anthology by Brown Critique, Poetry Conclave Yearbook as well as literary magazines such as Punch, Borderless, Muse India, Madras Courier, The Usawa Literary Review, Men Matters Online and many others.

Shir Ariya is a London-based writer from Bangkok, Thailand. She loves poetry and film and has a particular passion for stories with a surrealist twist. You can find her on Instagram @shirariya.

Shrehya Taneja has completed her M.Phil in English Literature from Delhi University, India. Currently a teacher, her poems have been published in journals (both print and online). She has a novel 'When You Were Betrayed' published on Amazon (Kindle) and a collection of her poems 'Pearls in the Rough', available with both Amazon and Bookleaf. Poetry to her has always meant taking the time off from the mundane to reflect on the wonder and mysteries of life but in an unhurried manner. Each poem for her is a labour of love. This particular poem in Issue VII was written as part of the Poetry Half-Marathon. Instagram handles - @wearing_rose_colored_glasses & @littlelovelyinlife.

Tyler Hurula (she/her) is a poet born and raised in Denver, Colorado. She is queer, polyamorous, and a pet parent to two cats. Her poems have been published previously in Anti-Heroin Chic and Aurum Journal, Rat's Ass Review, Quail Bell Magazine, and Gnashing Teeth Publishing. Author of Love Me Louder published through Querencia Press. Her poems feature love, polyamory, family, growing up, and being queer. You can find her on instagram @theprettypinkpoet.

