

Fahmidan Journal
Issue 3: Winter Wonder

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saudade

Isaura Ren

for minha avó

my grandma calls it *a felicidade na tristeza*:
the joy in the sadness, maybe the other way

around. her mother tongue slides past my
ears, too much of the new world. *in the old*

country, avó mutters as we strip scales off
filets, *they soak codfish in the ocean, not the*

sink, because god made the ocean why? she
glides her knife cleanly between skin and

meat, leaves only the latter—a skill i have
yet to master. i picture her there, a girl of

thirteen, nine sisters rising from the blue.
the islands have changed since, seen their

villages swell into cities. where once there
were no cars to speak of, roads now snake

like concrete deltas, the list of what is still
unchanged slim and waning slimmer. *but*

as hortênsias, she says, as if the word itself
clots in her mouth. across the archipelago,

azure clumps of hydrangea nod, thick and
dense as cabbage roses. they shudder with

the slightest breeze. *right now*, avó plunges
wrist-deep into blood, *like clouds in the rain*

they are shifting. i believe her because i can
hear them, even here in this rainless place.

even here, they call me at the edge of sleep
from the blades of bedroom fans, from the

static of our television sparkling into dark.
even here, our hands in a thing that lived,

(line break)

when we turn on the faucet to wash down
the proof—if i listen close, i hear the song:

the susurrations of their shivers, whispers
of my name from a home i'll never know.

Isaura Ren (she/they) is a poet, editor, and aspiring novelist from Northern California. They believe the best conversations take place while cleaning a fish. They are the author of *INTERLUCENT* (2020) and the Editor-in-Chief of *perhappened* mag, an online monthly lit journal preoccupied with memory and the surreal. Find them on Twitter @isaurarenwrites.

Christmas Isle
Kristin Garth

On Christmas Eve into a boat of pine
two lovers climb their fourteenth time they row
towards their Christmas Isle. It hides behind
their house a quarter mile. Inside a grove
of balsam firs, a pile of oak awaits next to
a cabin undisturbed with furnishings
save fireplace, bed, campfire Dutch oven stew,
long socks (ivory, red). They only bring
sweets, armfuls of books, mutual lust, long-
lost looks (of occupants of a decayed
estate amidst repairs they calculate). Wrongs,
invoices left on land, as many days
as they can stand for fruitcake, gingerbread
and merriness they make inside a bed.

Kristin Garth is the author of seventeen books of poetry including *Flutter* *Southern Gothic* *Fever* *Dream*, *The Meadow* and *Candy Cigarette* *Womanchild* *Noir*. She is the *Dollhouse Architect* of *Pink Plastic House* a tiny journal and has a weekly sonnet podcast called *Kristin Whispers* *Sonnets*. Visit her site Kristingarth.com and talk to her on Twitter @lolaandjolie

When the Collective is the Weak Link

Adeeba Jafri

The food court is usually packed after school. In the cacophony of noisy children, gossiping mothers and harrowed maids placing orders for food, the decibel level of one voice grows higher and higher, drowning out every other sound. Despite the sheer volume of people, the food court falls eerily silent as everyone's gaze hones in on one particular coffee house.

A middle-aged man in national garb is clearly upset. He berates the young, female barista for serving his coffee late. When the coffee is finally served to him, he discovers that the coffee is cold and unleashes a diatribe of foul language on her. The barista quickly exits from behind the counter to take his coffee and offer him a new one. Instead of calming down, he violently grabs her arm and drags her to the cash register. In the commotion, the monitor falls to the floor and while the barista's colleague bends down to pick it up, the national man slaps him on the back of the head.

Perhaps in another country, someone might have stood up.
Someone might have approached the man to calm him down.
Someone might have dared to push him away from the terrified workers.
Someone would have yelled from afar.
Someone would have called the police.

There are critical moments in life whereby the collective is more powerful than the individual, when the actions of the few are so visibly wrong that they simply cannot be tolerated in public. In Middle Eastern countries, where the population is made up of a small percentage of national citizens while the vast majority are expatriates, the collective is the weakest link. A fear of job loss and fear of retribution in a country where most people don't speak the national language permeates every sector of society. In the duration that an expatriate works, they may come across countless examples of blatant discrimination staring them in the face, but can do nothing about it except hate it in his/heart.

It is for this reason why, in a crowded food court primarily populated by expatriates, no one said a word.

These acts of aggression are far and few, but they do happen. In some Middle Eastern countries, expats make up the vast majority of the population. Though discrimination is frowned upon, it is never overtly challenged. For example, no one in the food court found such behavior as acceptable, but then, why wouldn't anyone intervene? Why wouldn't anyone speak up? Furthermore, why would no one bother to pick up a phone to videotape this incident? This issue stems from a deep-rooted problem, where nationals dismiss expatriates, regardless of their race, gender, or nationality, as temporary workers, rather than fellow citizens.

Oil, one of the most precious fossil fuels on earth, was first discovered in the Middle East back in the early 1900's. As one country after the other made similar discoveries, oil companies swarmed the area, bringing with them hundreds of thousands of workers in a relatively short

period of time. There was no gradual influx of immigrants that would allow the countries to adjust and subsequently welcome them into society. Workers arrived via a contract that allowed them to work in the country for a fixed period of time. Expatriates were never viewed as being part of the cultural makeup. They were an outlier, a temporary solution to the never-ending work needed to bring backwater third world countries into the modern era. Their purpose was to work in different sectors, develop the country's infrastructure, thereby contribute to the wealth of the nation run by the elite few. Why assign them any rights when their presence was but a fleeting moment to a country whose development was accelerating at an astronomical rate?

This perception of expatriates as temporary workers is ingrained in the society of multiple Middle Eastern countries and can be felt in every sector. For the expatriate, the glass ceiling is much lower. Job mobility rarely occurs as managerial positions are only allotted to national citizens, regardless of whether or not they have the skills for those positions. In the workplace, one's merit as an expat worker can easily be devalued and subsequently replaced by other expats who are less qualified but, due to their nationality, bear less cost to the company.

On any given day, it is perfectly acceptable to be physically overstepped in lines, to be harassed off the road, and to be unattended to, even when you're staying right in someone's face. A simple "please" or "thank you" is nonexistent. In health centers, one would think that doctors and nurses assist patients based on the severity of symptoms, not by one's passport. Unfortunately, the norm is to walk into a doctor's office and see two buttons: one for the expat and one for the national. You can complain about someone's driving and find yourself in a never-ending lawsuit directed at you, one that only gets thrown out when the national citizen simply tires of harassing you. Preferential treatment to national citizens has been normalized to such an extent that in a crowded food court, you can find yourself berated and physically assaulted by a national man over a cup of coffee, while no one lifts a finger or says a word.

Access to social programs is limited. Though my middle school son was an exceptional soccer player, he was sidelined even when his team was losing in favor of letting his national teammates play. Furthermore, it was "against the rules" to assign an expat player to be chosen for a team, no matter how good he or she played. In terms of long-term retirement plans, expatriates have little to no opportunity of availing the rights of national citizens, no matter how long they live and work in the country. Once an expat, always an expat.

Why, then, do expatriates put up with their second class status? The primary reason is financial. Whereas most Western countries charge an exorbitant amount of tax on one's salary, many expats find that they are able to save more from their income by living in the Middle Eastern country. It is for this reason, and this reason alone, that keeps many an expat quiet when they see any form of injustice against another expat. Complacency doesn't stem from approval of aggressive behavior, but from fear of losing one's job.

Times are changing. Middle Eastern countries have quickly caught up to the rest of the world in terms of education, technology and infrastructure. They have improved the housing conditions and social welfare of laborers. They have made legal amendments that allow workers to leave the country when they want, and switch jobs if they want. They have increased the minimum wage

of housemaids. What has not changed, however, is respect for the expatriate. Until this issue is addressed, systemic discrimination will remain embedded in the society for generations to come.

Adeeba Jafri is a Pakistani-American writer, teacher and IB Coordinator from NY, currently based in the ME. She is a mother of four and a published author. You can find her on Instagram @adeebajafri_official or on Twitter adeeba_jafri.

“WHEN OLAF MADE A SNOW FAIRY”

Anisha Kaul

The Christmas tree stands tall in all its majesty
Two pairs of shiny socks hang over the fireplace
Chubby little snowmen housed in the cookie jar
And an elf stationed near the gingerbread house
Glossy lights shine over the perfect holiday scene
A shadow against the window and he sneaks away
In his glittery hands, he holds the eternal flakes
Thinks of Rudolph and kicks the sleigh aside
At once, the uneven ground somehow levels
He feels at home on the freshly covered yard
Relaxes his tired limbs, the snow yields to his touch
Later, at twilight, rather composed, he walks away
Leaving his winged fairy imprinted at the door

Anisha Kaul is a poet with Masters in English Literature, presently living in New Delhi, India. She seeks to pen down her thoughts into a tangible script. Wrapped in her thoughts she is at solace, awaiting a new reflection. Her work is forthcoming or has appeared in Briefly Zine, Ink Drinkers Poetry, From the Farther Trees, Glitchwords, The Indian Feminist Review, Dwelling Literary, Kingz Daily, The Minison Project, Beir Bua Journal, Small Leaf Press, Analogies & Allegories Literary Magazine, and Visual Verse, among others. You can reach out to her on twitter @anishakaul9.

Epiphanies at the Christmas Tree Farm
Elizabeth Bates

The air smells of sap and evergreen—
and smoke from wood-burning fireplaces
while a cranberry-sunset glows,
only visible through silhouette boughs
of hundred-year-old trees in the distance.

Primitive echoes of wielded axes
strike trunks of firs
and the ones who did the wielding
claim their festive prizes.

Roped to the roof of their car
they head home.

In the alpenglow, the shadow-trees
are black smudges offset only by sky—

and then the sun goes down.

All is one.

What Winter Takes
Elizabeth Bates

Winter takes away pink and purple,
yellow, and green.
Gone are grassy summer days
and afternoons sipping tea
by the garden.
Winter takes air;
breathing is labored now
and exhales leave clouds like phantoms,
like the Caterpillar from Carroll,
but this is no Wonderland.
Winter takes birds and light
and warm and sun and song.
But even winter, in its taking,
gives.
Give absence.
Gives pause.
Gives quiet.

Elizabeth Bates is a Pushcart-nominated writer from Washington state where she lives with her husband, son, and two Siberian Huskies. She is the EIC of Dwelling Literary. Bates' column "Full Send" has been featured at The Daily Drunk. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in Your Dream Journal, GLITCHWORDS, Second Chance Lit, Poetically Magazine, Seaborne Magazine, Versification, and elsewhere.

CLAW FOOT

Renee Agatep

The day the bathtub comes to life, my three sisters and I are between training bras and training wheels. The enormous, once-white house stands in shambles behind us, facing the road. We scoop the froth and slush into a stainless bowl. Chrome edges reflect the December sun and it seems big enough to sled in, but there is no time for that.

Sarah points to drifts not too close to the driveway, so as not to gather up the salt dragged in by the neighbor's car. She reminds me not to near the back of the house, but my memory of the deceptively steep hill pulling me through the thicket of summer brambles has not faded so fast. The bowl's edge dragging the grit of the frozen ground makes my teeth ache.

I'm one of the little ones, the tag-a-longs. We follow the big ones, so we stomp our thin shoes on loose wooden boards and march in and out of the house through the slap of the screen across that sagging kitchen floor.

See, no water runs in this house, not this month anyway. We're the kind of family that has one utility at a time and the whole school knows it. The big ones stand on chairs, and into the tall, bespeckled pot they tip the snow. We stand in the smell of unburned gas catching our breath.

We follow our mother's instructions – we light the burner and let the stockpot come to a boil, filling it with bowl after bowl of snow and sleet. When the water is hot, we follow the big ones up and down the groaning stairs. The bathtub is sealed tightly, its rubber plug held fast by a metal chain. We form a line by height in a parade of boiled snow that rises above the grey ring about the top edge.

It could have bathed soldiers in the Civil War, that tub. It could have walked across battlefields, its feet painted over and over, chipped and re-chipped, exposing something black and rusted beneath. The claw foot could have drowned thousands, it could have fallen in love, it could have been famous before climbing the stairs of this house and taking up residence next to the sink.

My mother's things are here – broken eye shadows, tampons in search of their boxes, mascara, creams and pastes, sprays and spritzes. They cover the counter, they spill out of baskets, they erupt onto the floor and into the sink. But I don't see them the day the bathtub comes to life.

I don't so much as glance at the sink. I watch those claw feet every time we reach the top of the stairs, the checkered linoleum cracking beneath them. The big ones strain under the dangerous weight of the fifth or sixth boiling pot, but my eyes watch the feet of the tub. That's when I see it. I see that iron monster twitching its smooth talons, threatening to run off with all that hard-earned, boiled snow steaming in its belly.

Its cast iron sides are still so hot that, by the time the tub is full, my mother scalds her boney feet red testing its strength. We lie on our stomachs in the hall and look under the door to

see if it's cooled, but hours pass into afternoon. We wait for the tub to lose its heat, for the cool murky water to be ours.

She passes us in a hanging mist of lilac and freesia. My sisters shed their thin cotton skins in the hall, but I am cautious and last. I wait to be sure the tub's feet stand still.

I hold that memory to the light like a cat's eye – an assembly line of laughing little girls with beards made of bubbles. Sarah's black locks behind me, twisting like storybook vines about her collar bones. I'm between Rachel's wet, round shoulders and Amy's mismatched legs. The giggles closest to the faucet will always carry less shame than the back. They echo from the bath, down the stairs, through the frigid house and onto the street. Long after the door closes behind her, her short skirt, her sparkling purse – the tub stays right there – holding us in its tepid walls.

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Renee Agatep writes of rust belt beginnings but now lives in Florida. She earned her master's at Northeastern University and studies creative writing at the University of Central Florida. Her flash can be found in FlashFlood, Ellipsis Zine, The Journal of Compressed Creative Arts, perhappened and elsewhere. She is on Twitter @GoingbyRenee.

Icing Sugar **Zahirra Dayal**

You step out of the artificially lit arrival halls into the piercing glare of a frosty December afternoon. The glacial air seeps into the cells of your shocked skin. You've never experienced cold like this and are ill-prepared with your slender coat even though the man at the flea market assured you that it was for the European cold. "Feel this," he said, ordering you to feel the fleece on the jacket's inner lining.

Your head is still spinning from all the questions that were hurled at you during the interrogation by the immigration officials who pulled you aside and cornered you in a room the size of a box. "Why are you here? Where will you be studying? How much money do you have?" Pointless questions, the answers to which were already emblazoned on the bright green stamp in your passport, the landing card you and the documents they plundered from the brown suitcase your grandfather bought you as a leaving gift. They rummaged through your things, upsetting the neat colour coded layers meticulously arranged by your mother and sisters who packed your bags.

They release you only when your passport is cleared by the fraud department and the college that sponsored your study visa confirms your existence. You emerge from the building, 5 hours after you land, your shoulders shrinking into your frame and your eyes scanning your surroundings furtively. Your agent promised there would be a man holding your name up when you arrived, but there is nobody here to welcome you. You try to paint a look of fearlessness on your face, not wanting to reveal your vulnerability to the taxi drivers hovering around you like hungry sharks. One of them asks you where you are going and you ignore him clutching your bag handle tightly and wheeling it in the opposite direction. You leave a trail of thick silence behind you. You decide to go back into the terminal building to gather yourself but just as you are entering the revolving door, you see an annoyed man holding a sign with your name misspelt on it. Your spirits lift,

"That's me, that's me, I'm Mariam, I'm Mariam Bahiyya," you say running up to the man. Your saviour is here. The tall man with tired, rugged features looks right through you and mumbles that you are very late. He turns towards the exit and you follow, trying to keep up with his long strides. As soon as you jump into his car, he turns on the radio to silence any potential for conversation so you bite your cheek for the duration of the journey to stop the words from bursting out. Your spirit is dancing beneath your skin. You can't believe you're actually in London; a place you've travelled to countless in your dreams. You've grown up on a diet of Britishness with Mr Bean and Enid Blyton Books which you devoured in your childhood. You studied Shakespeare, Chaucer, Dickens and Hardy at high school and it feels like you've been to all the famous landmarks already. There's nothing to see outside because it's already dark.

When you arrive at your host family's semi-detached property in Wimbledon, your host mother tells you to remove your shoes or you'll ruin the cream carpet and your host father and two teenage sons peer at you wordlessly. In the long letters you exchanged, the family sent photos so you recognise them all, but you stand awkwardly now, shivering and waiting to be invited in. Your host mother leads you to your tiny room in the loft of the expansive Victorian house and points to the bathroom that she says you'll share with the other student who lives in the house. You've missed dinner because they were expecting you hours ago and she informs you breakfast is at 8 before shutting the door to your gurgling stomach.

Suddenly, there's a loud knock on the door and a woman bursts in wearing pyjamas and fluffy bed slippers.

‘Look outside, look!’ she screams without introducing herself. You see the white flakes gliding down.

“It’s my first snow!” she declares and grabs your hand in hers. “It hardly ever snows in December. You brought the snow with you!”

Together you watch in silence as the snowflakes slice through the darkness settling on the ground, making everything extraordinary. Like icing sugar on a lopsided cake. It’s a good omen, and you decide that you’re going to be ok here after all.

Zahirra is a writer and English language teacher based in London. Her work can be found in the Fahmidan Journal, Ayaskala Literary magazine and in forthcoming issues of Opia and Small Leaf Press. She has also lived in Zimbabwe, South Africa and The United Emirates and draws from these diverse experiences in her writing. She is currently editing her debut novel.

Winter Awake
Dana Knott

Insomnia is the overthinker's disease,
the mind's will over the body's need for sleep.
I count snowflakes instead of sheep.
You say the depth of love, like snowfall,
can be measured. I say love, like snowflakes,
conceals an imperfection at its heart.
Each translucent, faceted crystal reflects
the illusion of white and blue moonlight,
the dream of a peaceful night's rest.
Sleep is simply play practice for death.
So I remain awake, eyes heavy,
some part of me afraid I will not return to you
when I drift, like snow, to sleep.

Dana Knott's writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Bitter Oleander*, *Parhelion*, *Emrys Journal*, *The Daily Drunk Mag*, *Dreams Walking*, and *Rejection Letters*. Currently, she is the Library Director at Antioch University in Yellow Springs, Ohio.
Twitter: @dana_a_knott

Hibernation
William Davis

we sheltered. here
we wintered. here
preserved our memories
in vitrine, wind
polishing our faces
making measured bites
from our bones
coaxing narrative
from wool
dropspindle plumbing
into mercury
cupboards drawn as shoulders
staples of warmth-
stakes of clove, husks of nutmeg
stilled heart of ginger
from these distilled prayers
vapor of a sun lifted
aromatic fingers, the swept dust of hearths
hands coupled
within immaculate prisms
grained nests
temperature's arrested decay

will d. is a nurse and occasional poet drifting southeasterly. Previous work with Daily Drunk, Your Dream Journal and Glitchwords. Scribbles under @ByThisWillAlone.

Preserve Tranquility
Jason de Koff

The lake was untouched,
the snow on top,
melded with the ice below,
leaving no definition or horizon.

Born of a meteor,
carving a bowl,
with a great circular ridge,
leaving little light below.

The lake was discovered,
cores penetrated the ice,
sinkers loaded with bait,
descended the infinite depths.

Without fail, the lines broke,
all gauges lost to the deep,
better materials were deployed,
with great trophies in mind.

An hour was spent cranking,
the catch, when it surfaced,
shot straight from the water,
dispatching mission objectives.

The many-eyed orb,
blanketed the world,
as it detonated its bomb,
of microbial dismay.

Jason de Koff is an associate professor of agronomy and soil science at Tennessee State University. He lives in Nashville, TN with his wife, Jaclyn, and his two daughters, Tegan and Maizie. He has published in a number of scientific journals, and has over 60 poems published or forthcoming in literary journals in his first year of publishing poetry.

Twitter: @JasonPdK3

A Winter Spell
Lisa Armstrong

our bodies move in lines of synergy. snow falls like glitter.
hissing her hymn, she rises. willowy, pale arms twisting and extending.

her long fingers project an image upon the nocturnal sky - my fractured heart. then
the burning – searing – I try to stifle the pain. Sweet release. calmness ensues. she
makes a promise. Seals the deal. leaves a jar that glimmers - a golden light. like
dragonflies looping through the night - guiding me - at last I climb out of the
blackness.

Lisa Mary Armstrong lives in South Lanarkshire with her children. She tutors law and
researches women and children's experiences of the criminal justice system. In what's left of her
spare time, she likes to write poetry and fiction, tinker with her piano and drink tea.

Missing the Paths in the Fields
Wei Zheng

The snow in the sky is lower than the cloud
But higher than the wings of the gray magpie
When a poplar tree is sawn down by its wings
I get two identical growth-rings
But neither can I get two identical leaves
Nor two identical snowflakes
After giving the morning sun a free hand
What else in the world do I grudge letting go of
No need to chase the seasons too soon
Just take it easy and take a clock apart
Behold! The paths crisscrossed inside the clock
How they resemble the paths in the fields

Wei Zheng was born in Jingzhou, Hubei province, China. He works for China Mobile and serves as a voluntary Spoken-English teacher, translator and interpreter in his spare time. He has written poems since the early 1990s, and his poems have been published in Poetry Journal, Poetry Exploration, Stars Poetry Journal, Poetry Monthly, Green Breeze Poetry Journal and other important poetry magazines in China, and he is also a contributor to Innisfree Poetry Journal, Apricity Magazine and Lucky Jefferson based in the US and Rainbow Poems based in the UK.

Snowfall Elegy
Kip Knott

The tracks I've left behind
like breadcrumbs for me
to follow should I turn back home,
or for someone else to follow
so I'm not left on my own too long,
the tracks I've left behind
fill with snow and vanish too quickly,
like the brief time we had to love and hate
together. So now I find myself on my own
after all, the last flakes of snow
from the winter evening squall
stubbornly clinging to my eyelashes
as I drift away toward the field
where you had me scatter your ashes
before either of us was really ready
to spend the rest of our lives apart.

Kip Knott's writing has recently appeared in *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Dream Journal*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *MoonPark Review*, *perhappened mag*, and *trampset*. He is also a regular monthly contributor to *Versification*. His debut full-length collection of poetry, *Tragedy, Ecstasy, Doom*, and so on, is currently available from Kelsay Books. Two new poetry collections, *Hinterlands* (Close to the Bone Publishers) and *Clean Coal Burn* (Kelsay Books) are both forthcoming in 2021. More of his work may be accessed at kipknott.com.

Small Things

Hannah Sutherland

You meet him at the pub, on a Tuesday. You're both there with friends, enjoying the Christmas merriment. You're forcing yourself to be more sociable and tonight is the first night you've decided to act upon this resolution and you're instantly glad you did. It is as though you telepathically knew somehow that he would be here with rosy cheeks, looking adorable wearing his navy jumper with a cheerful penguin in the centre of it.

He nods in your direction from across the crowded bar laden with cheap tinsel and bodies fuelled with confidence and alcohol, raucous singing as *Slade* blasts out. You're fundamentally shy, tangled with nerves and anxiety but tonight even you feel giddy. He walks towards you; you remind yourself to breathe. His voice is deep and warm and he smiles a lot. You love everything he says, want to take his words and wrap them up in a neat little gift to yourself which you can listen to over and over when you're feeling overwhelmed. Explains he's really nervous, he doesn't usually do this, and you realise you're the same.

You really want a cat for company when he's working late but instead you make a child together, a perfect little version of you both. Your son arrives one morning, five weeks early, when the snowflakes dance on your face, a pleasing sprinkling of chilly confetti, cooling your flushed cheeks as you pound the cobbles to the maternity unit. You look at your boys and you think of your full heart which is close to bursting from behind your ribs. It's ability to continue to love impresses you.

There's a Christmas party which you take your son to when he's three. His spun golden hair flows as he does a twirl. You love how smart he looks in his jeans and tartan, and he loves it too, pulls at his shirt and says "oh, wow Mama." He smiles for his photograph which you already know you'll print and frame, induced with pride.

At the party, you are greeted by smirks and sly side glances; you aren't wearing designer shoes, your hair isn't poker straight, your skin's problematic.

Your son's timid. You encourage him to dance with the children, but he stands on the side-lines, biting his fingernails, looking from them to you, shaking his head. After a while, he tip-toes to the boys with styled hair and boundless energy, asks if he can join in. They circle him, call him names, push his small chest, say no. Your heart stills. Your face flushes and your lip trembles. You are suddenly too hot, furious, devastated.

Two outcasts make another.

Your lovely son turns and runs into your arms, to safety. You pick him up and sit down at the table, ignoring the world. He feels safe with you and so you hold him, inhale the coconut of his shampoo, stroke the smoothness of his infant cheek. You are his safe space and you'll not show him how much this hurts you.

You hold him tighter that night as you snuggle on the sofa with the flames licking in the logs in your fireplace, the lights of the tree you lovingly decorated as a family flickering. You read him every story he wants, ten times over. You let him eat tomorrow's advent calendar

chocolate just because. You hold his tiny hand in yours as he slips off to a deep sleep, whispering how much you love him and hoping he knows.

You don't tell your partner. You sit together underneath the blanket, gorging on mince pies and mulled wine, watching television. When he asks how the party was, you lie. He smiles, says he wishes he could have come, completely blissful in his ignorance. Comments on how satisfying *Elf* is as a film. You think how pleasing it would be to only have thoughts like this occupying your mind.

You want to forget about earlier. You want to feel the warm surge of contentment take residency inside you. You cuddle into his cosy chest, listen to his kind heart beating. You realise you are terrified of the day when it will finally stop.

Hannah is a Scottish writer. She placed 2nd in the Writing East Midland's Aurora Prize for Writing. She's currently longlisted with two short stories and a flash fiction piece for Retreat West's Short Story and Flash Fiction Prizes. She is also longlisted for Cranked Anvil's short story competition. Her prose is published in Fahmidan Journal, Remington Review, (mac)ro(mic), Product Magazine, WriteNow; A Literary Journal, Milkyway Magazine and most recently as part of The Common Breath's new online series. She can be found on Twitter @HannahWrites88 and Instagram @HannahSutherlandWrites.

Cold Fronts
Kevin A. Risner

Patience

sparrow!

You keep crying about us today.
How many times have I told
You the human race has a set timeframe?

We spin in desperate disparate directions
Eyes blank. This cold front could be the one
To plunge our bodies deep into winter. I see,
The weatherperson lunges forward like a javelin thrower.
Their hands glide along jagged blue teeth.
They show us the frigid air
From Alberta
A clipper I remember like my grandfather's
Razor buzzing through my overgrown locks.

Our minds have atrophied. Weather
Shifts every hour. We're always weathering
A new storm. Things never seem to get much better.
But my god I hope they will soon.

I just want to sit on a lounge chair in October
Stare at yellowing oak tree leaves before they drop
Faster than the storms as they swoop
Over the lake and pile snowdrifts
Into perfect mounds
The freshest sparkling grave plots.

Kevin A. Risner is a product of Ohio. He is author of *Do Us a Favor*, forthcoming from Variant Literature. His work can also be found in Glass, Ghost City Review, Kissing Dynamite Poetry, Perhappened Mag, Signal Mountain Review, and elsewhere

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To Friends I Stop Talking in 2020

Liswindio Apendicaesar

December morning falls upon my bedroom window
dawning into the horizon, as the sun is shying away
to warm the atmosphere, and the clouds are swollen
sea in rather curling gray.

I breathe in the melancholy; my chest understands
another year will soon end up buried in memory.
I don't know how nothingness can be packed into
bursting existence, and how life transpires into loss.

Perhaps the dying childhood, or the lovelornness that
accidentally gets mixed into my cup of coffee, and
the disappointment of the unwanted gifts under the
timeworn Christmas tree. What's there to say about
people who grow apart, and friends who remain
as mere Instagram stories?

TV shows are full of happy people surrounded by
stellar cities and snowy road, as if they were moths
searching for warmth, and newspaper is written
in the unknown text to the homeless migrating birds.
I scroll through my phone's gallery, seeking
for familiarity that I can relate to the narratives of
winter holiday.

Seasons we shared freeze in unposted pictures, albeit
the sky here doesn't bother about the white scenery
as it only jags the air with its cold indifference.
But the heart has its own credo, like the miraculous
fractal of snowflakes.

I fall back into bed, waiting for a notification, a story,
a picture, and caption of yours,
to see you're wonderfully alive.

The Snow You Talk About **Liswindio Apendicaesar**

I don't know how snow looks like
or feels like. I don't know how cold
the ice would freeze my skin, or how
it would melt upon my vaporous breath.
I don't know if it's fluffy or a solid
rock.

I don't know how Frosty the Snowman
is made and shaped, and how it would
walk along the snowy road. Does it
need a shelter in time of blizzard?

The sun shines all year long here.
It's so bright sometimes that my eyes
hurt. Cold rain sometimes falls, but still
it's watery.

You come telling me types of snow
in words and terms I don't recognize,
in English I don't use in my speech or
prose. I try so hard to fantasize them,
but it's like an empty dream: tasteless
infinite white.

You say you miss the snow in December
along with the joyful ringing bells
that woke you up when you were a child
to prepare—being a good kid—for Santa's
presents.

I still don't know anything about the snow,
but I know, it brings you wonders and joy.

Liswindio Apendicaesar is an Indonesian writer who loves poetry and short story. He is involved in Pawon Literary Community in Indonesia. In 2019 he joined Intersastra's translator team for the Unrepressed issue.