

Fahmidan Journal

Issue 1

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23.46

By Tuur Verheyde

On the belly of a starless sky,
Flayed love is worn dripping tears.
I gore the gutters of your smile,
Drink from the scalp of trust.
Finally I bash in hope and its bollocks.
Free, I burst into ink and blood.
'Bye' says the deer dying in desertion.

Tuur Verheyde is a twenty-three year old Belgian poet and student, currently completing a Master's Degree in English, Literature and linguistics at the University of Ghent. Although Dutch is his first language, Tuur writes poetry exclusively in English. It often discusses current events, progressive politics, spirituality and highbrow and popular culture as well as personal experiences and stories.

Links

<https://twitter.com/TuurVerheyde>

tuurverheyde.wixsite.com/thebedlamscribe

Tips for Less Cleaning Up
By Damien B. Donnelly

I saw a jellyfish once, just beyond the tide,
a tick away from time's reach where it couldn't sting.

On the same beach, once, though years later,
as we dipped our desires below the moonlight,
I lost your ring.

A week later I found your sting was laying in other beds.

I thought love was less abundant then, before I left,
before I found Paris and perished slightly under its pretensions

though I never shivered at that time or in the water,

not that time with the jellyfish, or later,

when that base metal that would never become gold
freed itself from my finger.

I cast you all off later, after, when Paris passed
and I set off to chase bland blond hairs
through the dunes the Dutch had recalled from the sea.

I agree that I have worn many rings since then
but not one of them have drowned me-

I always pick one size bigger so it slips off
without leaving too much of a mark.

I think that's why I like salads-
chopped lettuce, some pulses and a breast of chicken-

they don't take much cleaning up, afterwards.
However, the French, as a rule,
never cut through salad, on their plate, in public.

You By Damien B. Donnelly

I hid
 your name
 in between a word,
 I put this word into a line
 crammed with so much content
 where you'd disappear behind the syntax
 and then, just in case, I tucked this line into a story
 that unfolded over time into a tale that would tell of a book
 that someone lost on a wrong beach while waiting for the right wave
 to take them out to where there was nothing but the depth of that deep blue.
 I hid you, in a word, in a line, in a story that told a tale in a book, I then placed you,

the
 smallest
 part
 of
 you

into a bigger whole, like I was reconstructing an onion, like I was resealing a Russian doll
 inside all her bigger sisters and every now and then I steal moments while they sleep
 and sink into a chair, into the book, behind the tale within the story until
 I come across the line and reach around and find you there, still,
 tucked in tight behind that word where I kept your name.

Damien, 44, Dublin born, recently returned to Ireland after 23 years in Paris, London and Amsterdam, has been writing since childhood, poetry and short stories questioning identity, sexuality and fragility. His daily interests revolve around falling over and learning how to get up again while making delicious cakes.

He's been featured in the books 'Second Chance' from Original Writing, 'Body Horror' from Gehenna & Hinnom, 'Nous Sommes Paris' from Eyewear Publishing and The Runt Magazine. Online, he has been featured in Black Bough Poetry, Scribe Base, Barren Magazine. His debut poetry collection arrives this year via The Hedgehog Press.

couldn't make me slip By Linda M. Crate

you lost your wings,
 surrendered your light,
 and shed your
 humanity like snakeskin;
 you expected me
 to let you rule and dominate me
 I was never submissive
 to authority or those who tried to
 rule me because I am a queen
 and a goddess and a myth and a legend
 full of magic, power, and immortality—
 bowing before you wouldn't
 prove anything
 but foolish when I don't need
 a thing from you,
 because what you failed to recognize
 was I was a strong woman;
 you thought you could twist the knife
 of my pain and make me slip like azula
 instead I rose from the waters
 full of light and power
 ready to destroy every nightmare
 that threatened to conquer my world.

Linda M. Crate's works have been published in numerous magazines and anthologies. She is the author of six poetry chapbooks, the latest of which is: *More Than Bone Music* (Clare Songbirds Publishing House, March 2019). She has also authored two micro-collections, and two full length poetry collections.

Aurora Borealis
By Zach Murphy

Leo showed up 35 minutes late to his step brother Tim's funeral. He also dipped out right in the middle of his own speech.

"I always preferred funerals to weddings because at least with funerals people cry over something that is permanent" wasn't the best line to open with.

After hiding out all day, Leo emerged from his humiliated sulk and decided to go for a walk through his hometown of Duluth, Minnesota.

The evening clouds watched the waves crash against the jagged rocks of Lake Superior while Leo trotted along the Canal Park boardwalk.

He thought about the time when he and Tim were kids at the beach and Tim buried him beneath the sand and nearly suffocated him to death.

He thought about the time when Tim convinced him that lightning bugs were evil creatures that were out to electrocute people. Even as an adult, Leo still had nightmares about them.

And he thought about the green T-shirt. That stupid green T-shirt that Tim always wore. It was forever ironed into Leo's brain.

Leo stopped to sit on a weathered bench. A few feet behind him, there was a bush where a group of lightning bugs were congregating. After a few minutes passed, one of the lightning bugs landed directly on Leo's shoulder and he froze with fear. But when he got a closer look at the blinking creature, he admired its shine and realized it was quite a peaceful little thing. He even was disappointed when it zipped away.

Just then, he thought about Tim again. He was mad at himself for missing him. And he knew that if Tim knew about this, he'd make fun of him for it.

When Leo got up and continued on his walk, the wind diminished, the waves calmed, the clouds cleared, and an effervescent green light glowed brightly across the sky.

As Leo gazed out at the stunning site, he shook his head and smirked. "Fuck you, Tim."

Zach Murphy is a Hawaii-born writer with a background in cinema. His stories appear in Adelaide Literary Magazine, Mystery Tribune, Ghost City Review, Emerge Literary Journal, Spelk Fiction, Door Is A Jar, Levitate, Yellow Medicine Review, The Bitchin' Kitsch, Crêpe & Penn, WINK, Drunk Monkeys, Ellipsis Zine, and Wilderness House Literary Review. He lives with his wonderful wife Kelly in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Enucleation of A Ghost

By Kristin Garth

Turn knob to night, sclera white, you yearn
to puncture, pine to bite. Blinking blight
which floats to fight to point of no return,
enucleation rites, requires a slight
standstill before a flight of only feet
towards the scarlet sprite. A bird's birthright
to feed on sight assures a crow completes
her task tonight — enter a bedroom, slip right
by, masticating pupils of one who flies
affright into walls, to spite you, inside, airtight,
until you pull, all your might, window wide.
Swallowing, contrite, what specters would see,
you offer respite outside in willow trees.

Kristin Garth is a Pushcart, Best of the Net & Rhysling nominated sonnet stalker. Her sonnets have stalked journals like Glass, Yes, Five:2:One, Luna Luna and more. She is the author of seventeen books of poetry including *Pink Plastic House* (Maverick Duck Press), *Crow Carriage* (The Hedgehog Poetry Press), *Flutter: Southern Gothic Fever Dream* (TwistiT Press), *The Meadow* (APEP Publications) and *Golden Ticket* forthcoming from Roaring Junior Press. She is the founder of *Pink Plastic House* a tiny journal and co-founder of *Performance Anxiety*, an online poetry reading series. Follow her on Twitter: (@lolaandjolie) and her website kristingarth.com

**Tonight
By Mhoir**

you pluck the strings of my heart. Lovely dance.
You strike each chord in melodic phrases
Each step forward goes back a few paces
Our summer dream, joy of a horse's prance.

Together we perform this encompass-
-ing ritual that is society's
norm to test our joint will/anxieties
You tell me you want casual to pass

But I don't know, I want you here and now.
Maybe that is too much to ask of you.
I want - but can't i please melt your lips how
I want to, like soft butter and toast do.

Tonight we will surely embrace, my dear
For together tonight, you need not fear.

Pumpkingirlrl
By Mhoir

Together tonight you need not fear,
You told me you were going to kiss
me and I shivered and shook like a dear
old grandma with pneumonia to miss

out on life for. I didn't know that you
could be so enchanting in reality
or that I, so awkward, in front of you
asking: kiss? a piece of felicity

for us and the thumping of rain on roofs
bringing peace and serenity in our world
I can't believe it, I need to see the proof.
You like me? Not true, the colors are swirled.

I can't bear to hear my phone's bright hard ping.
Make me squeal, this might be the hardest thing.

Mhoir is a young bipolar genderqueer poet based in Pennsylvania, U.S.A. They are very interested in creating mental and physical spaces wherein people can explore their true identities. You can follow him on twitter @sadithine

women
By Anoosh

Land of the free, they said
Why do they then keep us caged?
An illusion of privilege—an outline of hierarchy is all I see
For my kin, is servitude and solitude all that can be decreed?
Be proud of what's been given for your body is an asset
They only forget to provide reasons that don't concern their greed

But I have seen a crack in their walls
Or two or three or a couple thousands
Just let me breathe and it's all I need to make them fall
Crumbling down, signaling the end of the bloody war
Shame, disgrace, as a stain, is all I'll be remembered for
But your grandeur is not how I remember my history
Servitude and solitude is what I will use to end this travesty

On the pursuit of following her lifetime wish of moulding feelings into words, Anoosh has recently started her dive into the poetry medium by letting her words bleed through paper—raw and unfiltered. Started initially as a therapeutic exercise, it has helped her make sense of life as it comes to her and learn through her documented experiences.

She has recently started an Instagram blog with the handle @sasta_n_khasta where she gives her writings a place to call home.

As You Say
By Rebecca Aldam

When Rat Sleep
That guy over there called her just
An uneducated woman. Just-un.
Done. You could get him sacked yknow.

Conveyed mortification, imbibed
Into the chocolates, fake as the tincture of youth
In his hair. He implied,
Did he not, this place is just for men.

Outrage is all the rage, but it fidgets,
squirms; doesn't quite
Fit or sit
Still. Prefer quietly pissed off.

Now, you've been hoodwinked
For the job. To the Room of Silence.
Is your husband
A heathen also?

And I put out my hand to meet them.
(wagging his eyebrows)
Nobody shook my hand.
(Yknow those squinting eyes?)

It was so subtle. It was
(You must have misread it)
Humiliating in a way that I
(Is it possible I misread everything?)

Knew would sound silly
(This is definitely true)
If I tried to tell someone about it.
(Wait. Is this true?)

Once they are disabled (he was angry)
Too late! It's water under the bridge: it's gone.
You English say it.
What they haven't got:

Those cyclists,
Champions of a new direction
Pour voler en haut.
Strange, spoken over by the Latvian

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By the American, by the builder
As a matter of course

I stop. I smile. But I think,
Cat Bite Him

Rebecca teaches English and History in a small, wonderful and progressive school near Stroud, England. When not teaching she is usually thinking about teaching, writing, and reading. She is a mother to two marvelous people and lives with them, their dad, and her partner in a beautifully-mad blended family. She has previously been published (named & anonymously) in the Stroud News & Journal, Cycle Sprogs website, Riggwelter Press, The Guardian and others. Twitter: @bekialdam

in the forest, a waterfall
By Grace Alice Evans

the moth's wings become a waterfall of restless ashes
as their miniature bodies pursue the glow of light and warmth,
to shield their frailty from the tepid darkness – reverberating
their futile wishes
for the once-heavenly rain
to cease. the earth beneath caves into itself, enraptured
in the crashes of the cuckoo's calling – the softness of its spine
curled against the denial of the pine-tree's overbearing
presence, the severity of its eyes gleaming in the unseen.

Grace Alice Evans (she/they) is a LGBTQ+, mixed-heritage poet, writer, sound/visual artist and survivor, whose work explores living with mental illness, trauma, recovery, and the dichotomy between the inner and outer worlds. Grace's social media handle is @gracealiceevans

The tangible promise of a first love

By Hannah Sutherland

We are having dinner with our families as the sky holds me in its embrace like an invisible veil, darkening around me. My parents and his converse, glasses of bubbling liquid sunk, noise rising and filling the air with each mouthful consumed. He clears his throat and looks at me with the corners of his mouth turned upwards and smiling. His voice has a lyrical lull to it as he speaks, like an arpeggio rising and falling as he speaks. I like listening to him, although what he is saying isn't particularly interesting, but I indulge him anyway. Syllables dance from his tongue and fill my mind. I imagine my limbs are magnetic, and he cannot help but be drawn to me.

The following morning, there is a muffling crackle of a radio playing in the distance, pool water lapping as my father glides effortlessly. I let him talk to me again. He is like an antidote which I crave at an unreasonable rate. I have earned him, and he is my tangible reward. I let his arm brush against mine when he reaches for more sun cream, pretending our touching has been accidental rather than deliberate. A flash of colour vividly displays his inner thoughts so openly. I let my eyes lock with his momentarily, just to let him know that I know, before tearing my gaze away and returning to my novel. A futile exercise where I simply skim the word on the page, unabsorbed.

I spray perfume that evening, sweet and delicious, lavish in my application. He smiles when we meet for dinner, you look lovely, he says, and I am pleased he appreciates my effort. My heart thuds between my legs, his arm against mine, the proximity altogether suffocating. I find myself unable to concentrate or converse. I sit, smiling, unsaying anything to my parents, at his, at him. He rests his foot on top of mine underneath the table, my mind blurs and I am gone. The secrecy of his placement is both exciting and nauseating in equal measure. I bite my lip, peel the skin from around my fingernail, imagining it lifting, revealing the bloody mess beneath, dig my nails to my thighs until the skin splits but I cannot concentrate on anything other than him and his foot. Our secrecy is so warm and delicious it presses down on me and I feel momentarily glorious.

Just us, standing on the edge of the promenade, he tells me how beautiful the view is. How beautiful I am. I allow his words to sit on my chest and imagine them as the truth. Filling my body with pleasure and fulfilment and worth. His lips are sweeter than I am used to as he cups my face in his hands and gently strokes the contours of my cheek. Smooth and soft, mouth hot on mine; it is altogether pleasant and satisfying. When we part, his nose is touching mine, his full lips parted, smiling. He holds my gaze, as though my face is interesting, and he enjoys looking at it as much as I do his. I wish to fold my body into his and be held. I do not wish for anything more, anything less.

His limbs recline into the sand as though his body belongs amongst the grains. We gaze at the sea, at the waves lapping the shore, caressing the golden hues as they rise and fall, commenting on the beauty surrounding us. I wish then that everyone knows how fulfilling it is to be in love and to be loved. How healing the world would become, if everyone was cherished. Nobody would ever doubt themselves again.

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The summer days continue with the promise of a love which extends vanity, spent together laughing, making music, reading, fumbling beneath cotton sheets like the giddy teenagers we are, maddened by a first love. Intoxicated by its fullness. The most satisfying of days. The most rewarding of gifts with each other as our prize.

Hannah is a Scottish writer. Her short story *The Encounter* is currently shortlisted for the Aurora Prize in Writing 2020 from over 900 entries. She has writing published in *Product Magazine*, *WriteNow: A Literary Journal* and *Milkyway Magazine*. Forthcoming work will be in *Remington Review* Fall issue, *(macro)mic* and *Dark Poets Club*. She can be found on Twitter @HannahWrites88 and Instagram @HannahSutherlandWrites

Found on No Maps

By Aura Martin

Centó from *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie

There are so many stories to tell. I must answer in adverbs and hyphens.

Dirty glass in the window; dirty glasses on the tables - the Pioneer Café was not much. The houses in the narrow lanes of the old city leaned over, jostled, shuffled, blocked each other's view. We must live, I'm afraid, with the shadows of imperfection.

What are you telling me?

Aadam's eyes are a clear blue, the astonishing blue of mountain sky. Blue with the weight of unspilled tears, too blue to blink.

I see no cracks, he intoned mournfully.

A crumbling old man. He had made the mistake of loving in fragments. I am, perhaps, hiding behind all these questions.

He cleared his throat; his eyes rolled away into the mountains of the past. *Never mind, you don't know one thing.*

In the renewed silence, I return to sheets of paper which smell just a little of turmeric, ready and willing to put out of its misery a narrative. Who says it's better to do one thing or another? Saffron minutes and green seconds tick away on the clocks on the walls. I won't deny I was disappointed. How can I know these things?

We will drive south south south into the heart of the tumultuous crowds, who will be throwing balloons of paint at each other. The wheels sang their abracadabras to Aadam's flapping ears.

For me, there can be no going back; I must finish what I've started, even if, inevitably, what I finish turns out not to be what I began.

Aura Martin is a graduate of Truman State University. She is the author of the forthcoming chapbook *Those Embroidered Suns* (Lazy Adventurer Publishing) and the micro-chapbook *Thumbprint Lizards* (Maverick Duck Press). She is a 2020 Sundress Publications Best of the Net nominee. Her work has appeared in *dreams walking*, *EX/POST MAGAZINE*, and *Kissing Dynamite*, among others. In Aura's free time, she likes to run and take road trips.

Monty's Diary

By Rebecca Kennedy

Dear Diary,

It is with a heavy heart that I write this. My grandfather, who underwent an operation with a 50/50 chance of survival, lives. Curse him! I've laced that man's tea with enough ethylene glycol to bring a bus full of county hurlers to their knees. Irish farmers are the true cockroaches of the earth. This afternoon, mother and I visited the invalid at his sick bed. His colouring is back to its pre-poisoning shade of ham and tufts of his hair have sprouted back. Eyes twinkling, he remarked that he hoped the stress of his surgery has not driven me "back to the fridge". Grandfather was tempting me diary, positively daring me to maximise the dosages I have been administering but I know his game. I overheard him tell mother he insists on a post-mortem before his will is read. Grandfather doesn't mind burning in hell as long as I rot in prison. I must come up with a new plan to gain my inheritance soon or my dream of seeing the Eurovision live will be nothing more than a feeble-minded fantasy. Thankfully, I am not one to be swayed from a goal. As Nelson Mandela once said: "The greatest glory in living lies not in never failing, but in rising every time we fall." Perhaps a farming accident? They are terribly common this side of the world. I need time to think. Meanwhile, I contented myself by 'tripping' over his catheter tube on my way out of his room. I could still hear the soothing sound of his screams from the carpark.

Lots of love,

Monty

Rebecca Kennedy is an Irish Writer. Her fiction has been featured in *The Crannog*, *The Coven*, *The Old Moore's Almanac*, *Hidden Channels*, and she represented Ireland in *The Women in Horror Anthology (Vol.1)*. In 2020, she was a Participant writer in 'The New in Three Lines' project launched by Public Relations Agency Story Lab, selected participating writer in 'South Dublin Libraries Online Feedback Sessions' lead by writer Brian Kirk, and she co-wrote and performed the comedy 'Quarantine' alongside Simon Ferris on RTE Radio One's 'Keywords' podcast.

The devil is a righteous leader
By Ayanfe

A society, imprisoned by greed.
Born, out of a family, lord by injustice.
Epitome of a figurative oppressor.
Impregnated by the blind religion .
Adulterated into morals.
In a season of hatred, love is lost.
They seek solace, in the beauty of the world.
The opulence they loathe, is greater than their manifestation.
The drug to the illness.
Their perfect addiction.

The yearn for better life,
Even in a deaf opulence.
Distracted by the taste of greed, they seek the path of the oppressor.
A loyal slave.
Tilting under their greatest oppressor.
They become submissive to his will.
Humanity is the price.
Religion is the card.
Nepotism is the identity.
The uniform sycophants.
Inheritors of expired education.
Blessed with the colourful certification.
Suit wielding grammarian.
Dishing out false hopes.
Recreating lies.
Presentable in all disposition.
The man of the people.
A perfect Nigerian.

Heir apparent, to the throne of hell.
From grass to grace.
A success story.
He had no shoes.
A man of integrity.
Categorize by the media whore.
Publish by the story tellers.
Propagated by the sponsored activist.
Empowered by the spiritual leaders.
The son of the soil.
In cash we trust.

(Line Break)

The new emperor of hell,
 With the insane magic wand, miracles are expected.
 Guarded by seasoned sycophants.
 Presented by the man in suit.
 It's time for the gains.
 That comes from investing in greed.
 The perfect human sacrifice; sacrificing the honour of a girl child.
 The education of children.
 The feeding of the populace.
 The salaries of his workers.
 The future of the youth.
 The inheritance of the aged.
 Looted in the name of the king.
 The masses weep, to the lord of the nation.
 Seeking protection, from money looting jackal.
 They have forgotten; that, they are the king makers.
 They have forgotten, that their souls belong to the king .
 Oh! They have forgotten.
 That the evil, in the breast of men, empowered the prince, to become King.
 They were warned, to get rid of religion bigotry.
 The king empower their greed
 So, he was a good man.
 The opulence they loathe, is beyond their manifestations.
 In hell; the devil, is a righteous leader.

Ayanfe is a writer and a poet. He is a Nigerian, who stays in Ibadan. His belief is that writing is therapeutic and poems should be flexible enough to talk about different situations from different societies. He is also a native of Ibadan.

Monsoon

By Thomas Heath

'Monsoon'

On a pier of grey stones and lightbulbs, with
splintered wood under my shoes
sailing ships grapple waves.
I'm alone until the monsoon pulls
me out with the tide and washes away
the external thing I call 'me'.

The ships sift fiercely through
upturned water, surfacing
embryos in rain.

Take in a painful breath,
that flows through spaces between my
veins, my lungs, flows through spaces
in between hands that hold each other, between
arms that grasp each other in winter coats.

On a pier of grey stones and lightbulbs,
I conjure spectres from the sonic past
in torrential, satellite rain.

Collapsing, free-form falling rain
shatters in my hair in
newly-made shards.

Deep into the shimmering low, the sea
sings like a whale born
fresh to the punitive world,
I listen to the old spirits.

Exhale a cloud that reaches
into cold canvas, touching
the fringes of the black railing,
to feel motion in the air,
as if I, and what I have known, are the same.

They come from city streets
and front rooms and TV sets and gardens
and offices and old, gone mining towns.
The spaces in between

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are never empty; they brim
bulge with memory and sound.

In a downpour of minutes,
rumbling, I listen.

Remembering is watching a laptop tumble like a
pearl from a block of flats until
you realise it belongs to you.

It's keeping Lego blocks for no
other reason than that
they were once yours.

I put my hands in pockets to go
catch a train, under mythical skies messy
with clouds and daylight.

I listen to the sea,
its holy drone, its lo-fi hum,
to the spaces in between,
to the waves, to the rain.

the waves
the rain

to the sea.

Thomas Heath is a poet and playwright based in the UK. He specialises in abstract performance and expressionism, aiming to reflect contemporary cultural anxieties through mythology and the natural world. He is fortunate enough to have had work performed at The Old Red Lion theatre and VAULT arts festival in London, as well as being included in the 'Truly U' and 'You Are Not Alone' online literary magazines.

Changing Minds
By Jason de Koff

Rescuing today from tomorrow,
the fast-paced mind,
seeks deliverance,
from focusing on the future,
before the day is done.
Inner battles are fought,
along chemical wormholes,
to halt electrical signals,
already transmitted,
across the gyrified landscape.
Pulling desperately on the reins,
of a high speed locomotive,
bent on making the same,
twists and turns,
as planners taught from childhood.
Great gnashing of kinetics,
and unsettling notions of abnormality,
yield to untrammelled territory,
where the weedy barrens of the babe,
are re-explored with older eyes.

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 recently has had poetry accepted in other literary journals.

Salesman of Personalities
By Vincent Topp

We want you to link in with our hive mind
We will sell you our dreams as yours
Using beautiful language and imagery to say nothing of worth
Coined a phrase, copyrighted a life
Sell you back who we want you to be
We are the salesman of personalities

Want to be an original in a counterfeit world
Who's who in a world of sellers
You'll never find the answers to your own problems
As you keep stepping into neurosis puddles
Self destructive peddlers of an unobtainable self image
We are the salesman of personalities

Titans of manipulation
Proxy conjurers of fake dreams and thus fake dreamers
The worth of some, is not the worth of all
You are deceived by folding doors and moving floors
If you can't trust the influence
Then you can't trust the influencer

We can sell you a world you think your dreaming of
We are the dream catchers and crushers
Closed the choices
In this cult of personality
In a world of ego and vanity, sirens will lull you into the rocks

Sold an opinion, Sold a lie
The salesman of personalities
Distinctions in a vanilla world

Vincent Topp is a poet and writer living in North Wales. He is interested in writing, philosophy, psychology, nature, photography. He has been published in @TheRuntZine 11 and Poetry Now, Quantum Leap Twitter @vgtopp. Instagram vinnytopp.

Blog meamvin.blogspot.com/

TRANSFER STUDENT

By Kelly Washington

In the corner of my dorm room there's a tall box that contains all the belongings of the girl who disappeared in the spring. It looks sad, this brown cardboard box, with its sagging sides, crumpled corners, and dust-covered flaps, shoved the way that it is between a bare bookshelf and an empty four-drawer clothing cabinet. The words "Sarah Mitchell" and "Darrowmore Hall Room 208B" are written at a slant on the side in black magic marker and I wonder if she was in a hurry when she wrote those words or if she gave it a great deal of consideration, like the way I carefully labeled my three boxes, which were placed next to the scuffed up desk in front of a curtain-less window that overlooked the tree lined ground commons. This time last year, Sarah would have sat at this desk and observed students rushing to and fro classes, books tucked under arms, laughter and conversation wafting up from the timbre of a hundred voices strolling about the sprawling campus. Did she feel alone in this austere square room or was she the life of the party, always welcomed within any crowd, sharing secrets and sorrows and joys? The condition of Sarah's forgotten box laid claim to the former but my imagination conjured the latter. If I allowed myself to peek inside her box I'm sure I'd find tell-tale traits of her fun personality: rolled up posters of her favorite bands, party dresses, snapshots of her with best friend, with more intimate portraits of her snuggled up against a cute boyfriend; there'd be a goofy photo of her pet back home—a scruffy dog named Jack, perhaps—taped together with one of those professional-looking portrait studio photos of her successful parents, and maybe a younger brother, one with braces and a cowlick. I had none of those things so it was an easy exercise to stand in my empty dorm room trying to visualize my future life within its whitewashed walls and inhabit the memories and habits of a girl I'd never met. The hidden contents of a forgotten box were overpowering. I wonder if Sarah's clothes might fit me, if her best friend might like me, if her boyfriend might date me, if her family might claim me. In that moment I decide I want to be like Sarah Mitchell because if I become who I think she was, does that mean she really disappeared?

Kelly is the author of the *Falling for Him* trilogy as well as the four-volume series, *Reclaimed Souls*. Her short fiction has appeared in *Pulp House Fiction Magazine*, *Kaleidotrope*, *Heart's Kiss*, and in more than a dozen anthologies throughout her writing career. Her short story, "The American Flag of Sergeant Hale Schofield" was a 2016 Year's Best Crime and Mystery Story. Currently, she's an assistant editor for the inaugural issue of "Tales from the Year Between, Vol 1, Achten Tan: Land of Dust and Bone."

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A Man by the Window with the Dark
By Alan Kissane

I think I'm being haunted
by my shadow. I wasn't sure
at first, I am now.
I don't trust it.
It doesn't just follow me around anymore,
it watches me quietly,
hoping I'll make a mistake.
It doesn't just copy me, my slow deliberate movements,
it mocks me, gestures
exaggerated, out of character, chronic, but never
when I stop to look. It just stares through me emptily,
unaware that I've seen it.
It no longer appears in the light like it should,
silhouetted from all angles—
I caught a glimpse of it
in the evening darkness some time ago
crawling and sucking
across the floor like an injured spider.
I woke to a cry—I felt tears in my hand,
a small child. I don't even have kids.
I tried the light. Gone. Fled. The cord
to my bedside light had been cut, or burnt.
I used my phone instead before it
gave up. Odd pairs of
shoes were laid out in footsteps
leading towards the open window.
It was boiling. As if someone had tried to
melt the metal frame.
Blistered, pitted.
I've not seen my psychiatrist. She'll just say
I'm sleep deprived. I'm not. It's alive. It smiles
warm my face. I have burns.
They're getting worse
every day.
My heart hurts. No birds sit in the tree
outside my window anymore. It's empty
and crooked, I feel
abandoned.
Dead and dry. I think the birds
took its essence when they flew away to safety.
It's there now. Shhh. If you listen
you'll hear it. Quiet.
(Line Break)

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I think I'm being haunted
by my shadow. I wasn't sure
at first, I am now.
I don't trust it.
It doesn't just watch me quietly anymore,
it speaks.
The disks in my back slip
away at the guttural sound of its
throat. It's agony.
It hissed at me:
no respite here on the Plains of Purgatory.
I'd cry but I can't. My body is
drying up. My shadow
just smiles at me blackly.
I don't know how much longer this will go on,
I can't take much more.

Alan Kissane is a teacher of English in the East Midlands. His work is due to be published in forthcoming issues of Allegro and Emerge Literary Journal this September/November.

the man by the ferry

By SK Grout

you see him as the ferry pulls in, waving not
one hand, but both. a smile so wide
no myth can sustain it. under his arm
backwards
he carries a bouquet of flowers, peonies perhaps
the blush a possibility, the stalks point
toward opportunity.
like an infinite tent, the sky is stretched taut
singing a blue-grey melody
receiving clouds, seabirds, meteorites.
will he collect every body that walks past?
he keeps his eyes on you
even if it's happiness.

where shall you put this release?

you are not a riptide.
you are not a defence of what was.
you are not a name remaining to him.
you are not a transaction, but a prayer.

tomorrow
your time will have passed
and you will stand above a black
obscure sea
waiting

SK Grout grew up in Aotearoa/New Zealand, has lived in Germany and now splits her time as best she can between London and Auckland. She is the author of the micro chapbook "to be female is to be interrogated" (2018, the poetry annals). She holds a post-graduate degree in creative writing from City, University of London and is a Feedback Editor for Tinderbox Poetry. More information here:

<https://skgroutpoetry.wixsite.com/poetry>. Twitter/Instagram - @indeskidge

Trying not to make eye contact with the ghost my grandmother was friends with.

By: Meghna Anil Nair

She spoke only with
that Silence that women are condemned to,
that Silence they own and sharpen like a
smile in a dark room.
I caught several glimpses of Her
drifting around the house noiselessly
like a ghost in thick framed glasses and a
crumpled white sari that was blotched
with domestication.
Her Silence frightened me
but had no effect on my grandmother
who slipped effortlessly into those
obscure crevices like She had belonged there
too.
I would go back for her, of course,
after the time it would take for me to realise
that she and I and all of us
are the same,
born from the same mute mother.
The silent ghostly woman whose Silence
kept me up on nights that the air smelt like
smoke and the leaves rustled with secrecy,
I would watch her from the rare burst of
southwest sunshine, and she in her stained white

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cotton and crooked spine would say

with no words of her own:

we are all silent

in different tongues.

Meghna Anil Nairis a doctor, writer and poet. She co-founded The Open Culture Collective, a digital literary journal dedicated to highlighting work by underrepresented writers and artists. She lives in Chennai, India, and spends her free time watching football and hoarding books.

Women Wear, We Infer

By Aqueb Safwan Jaser

She was the notorious talk of the society.
Some marveled at her caramel colored skin,
while others questioned her morality.
The “pious” decided that she would incinerate in hell.
They may have forgotten that one day or the other,
she too may end up behind a veil.
No one really knew about her prayers to her God.
Neither the long nights of torment, she bravely fought.
During the night, she was her God’s favorite child.
During the day, her bare arm made other issues seem mild.
Alas!
Such is our society.
Whilst speaking proudly of modernization,
it’s still judgmental and full of peculiarity.
I wonder, how it is rational to judge a woman by her attire.
Weren’t we supposed to provide tranquility for all?
Instead of setting some in fire?

Aqueb Safwan Jaser is a Bangladeshi creative writer who appeared in an anthology titled 'Ten Square: Hundred Word Stories From Bangladesh' and The Elixir Magazine. Being a cinephile he also writes for High on Films. Currently, he is pursuing a degree in Marketing while working as a Content Writer.

**AFTER MONTHS OF LOCKING MYSELF IN MY APARTMENT AND
WATCHING NOTHING BUT RERUNS OF 90 DAY FIANCE I FINALLY FEEL
COMFORTABLE ENOUGH TO ADMIT THAT NATURE IS HEALING**

By Shawn Berman

at first the signs are subtle: faster wi-fi speeds in the bathroom making it easier to browse
guy fieri's imdb webpage.

next the shaved iced lady returns to her post outside of my apartment encouraging
customers to try her newest cherry cola flavor.

then, sure enough, the sun begins to peak out from the clouds and the world is calling my
name.

I make my way over to the park with my 99 cent facemask and stand on the bridge
overlooking the pond, watching in horror as a couple paddleboards dangerously close to a
family of baby turtles.

fortunately the turtles are able to parkour flip outta the way at the last second,

their impressively quick 13m/s reaction speed

most likely the reason why their species beat nasa astronauts to the moon in record-
breaking time when the soviet union's zond 5 spacecraft sent a pair of well-behaved
tortoises up to explore the uninhabited land so they could report their findings.

to be honest, i would probably sign a petition to replace all those big stupid mount
rushmore heads with every tmnt character including that bleep-hole master shredder

in a heartbeat

and if that doesn't get enough votes, then perhaps

I would settle for knocking it down and putting up a mega chili's/six flags combo in its
place so I can snag some banging 2 for 1 fajitas while sipping my \$1 margs in a booze-
filled lazy river

smiling as work blows up my phone wondering where i am

after no-showing my 8am shift at old navy without any notice for the 4th day in a row.

oh well.

we can't all be heroes.

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wake me up
when you have some good news to share.

Shawn Berman runs The Daily Drunk. His recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in Hobart, Rejection Letters, and Stone of Madness Press. Follow him on Twitter @sbb_writer.awn Berman

When Hurt Becomes the New Love
By Amee Nassrene Broumand

Sipping your light goes straight to the root of my eyeballs, like cold
through a straw. Sunglasses lost, a migraine coming on, I stumble home

through the city as skyscrapers reflect a blue world. Desert blue, cottontails
jumping. I rarely think of you anymore, yet there you were in the flesh, hello.

Now your face mocks me by the score, masking passersby with your mark.
Songbirds with your eyes attack dandelion fluff with sharp pecks, sending

parachutes into the April afternoon, incandescent and hungry for green.
Children with your clipped voice skip past me, singing: Cow or a cowslip,

feather and a fall, I'll tell you sumthin awful. Sidewalk trees sprout lips,
once evidence of pruned branches but now pursed with a taunting purpose.

Bells appear about my head and begin to yodel. I'll have to nap in the tub
again, a rolled towel blocking the door gap to stop the sun. Alice never had it

so batshit. Fingers ghostly, my disembodied hand twists the garnets on my wrist
until the drops bounce across the pavement. Or are they pomegranate seeds, panting

and bruised by thoughts of sunset. Long ago I looked into the vernal sun and saw
stars, vines racing through my soles and up my spine, twisting away into bluebirds.

Now confetti clogs the sunlight. You throw a parade without inviting me.
My balloon stretches until it bursts, releasing dozens of squabbling magpies.

Each one of them is you.

Amee Nassrene Broumand is an Iranian American writer from the Pacific Northwest. A Best of the Net nominee and a three-time Pushcart Prize nominee, her work has appeared in numerous journals including *Glass: A Journal of Poetry* (Poets Resist), *Rust + Moth*, *Barren Magazine*, *Sundog Lit*, and *Empty Mirror*. Find her on Twitter @AmeeBroumand.

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The lament of a broken house

By Fizza Abbas

I am a house
walled by inhibitions
and surrounded by hopes.

When I cry,
windows shudder,
ceilings fail to accompany me
I feel dependent
The need to hold them overpowers me
and I ask them to stay
But they have other engagements to attend to,
so they leave.

Now I'm at that point in life
where nothing makes sense to me -
My kitchen has lost its flamboyance,
I no longer hear the tinkling of plates
Or the daily brawls of saucer and tea
The taps of my sink, too, have become rude -
I wonder, do they even know I bore them for so many years?

The beautiful incandescent lamp that I brought from a local *bazar*
where it was lying in a large sack
among stained clothes and the wreckage of a crashed plane,
has too averted its eyes from me.

(Line Break)

Remember the navy-blue curtains that I adorned my bedroom with?

They have signed an anti-harassment petition:

'She is a controlling boss who doesn't know how to behave thus she should take a break and leave things as they are',

My beautiful broken window-pane told me this good news today
while I was enjoying a tete-a-tete with my unhinged door.

The green, beautiful plants in my garden
initially decided to stay with me,
but faced such a massive backlash that they had to go:
Peace lilies yelled,
Baby toes protested -
Aloe Vera helped them heal
Chrysanthemums bade farewell.

Soon they all left
leaving me with a few nasty neighbours
who were too showy and pretentious.
Often, they showed me their newly-built brick walls
and pearl-white sash windows,
wearing such a sly smile on their face
that I was forced to think of those days
when I was the pride of the block
and people used to escort their guests
by telling them about me.

Fizza Abbas is a Freelance Content Writer based in Karachi, Pakistan. She is fond of poetry and music. Her works have been published on quite a few platforms including Poetry Village and Poetry Pacific.

Bombay chai fog

By Aishwarya Javalgekar

is named after the London fog.

The lady smiles

when i ask for chai and point to myself.

My skin is explanation enough.

She concocts for me a brand new recipe
with black tea and vanilla milk
and which spices do I want? *All of them.*

It's foggy and tastes like watered down chai,
a bitter-sour taste lingers.

It's perfect! I smile. I come back for more.

She never asks my name and I'm grateful.

I'm just the girl who wants chai.

She pours her understanding into the cup.

I dip banana bread for a sweet aftertaste.

Crimson

By Aishwarya Javalkar

The tide is high.
A crimson wave overflows,
surges, consumes my mind and my soul.
Some of it isn't mine, I'm sure.

Legacy
is the grief I carry,
is the tiredness in my bones
gifted to me at birth, now grown
for twenty-five years.

Fear
of losing what I know,
of losing myself when memory
becomes nothingness
but I still exist.

But what will I be without the knowing?
Just a crimson wave—flooding
my dazed senses
that dull familiar ache
of a mind drowning
within.

Aishwarya Javalkar (she/her) is a feminist writer and editor with a Masters in English (Public Texts). Her recent work appears in perhappened, dreams walking, Dust Poetry, and Ghost Heart literary magazines. She is the editor-in-chief of ang(st) zine and explores identity, mental health, and the body through her writing. Find her at aishwaryajavalkar.com or follow her on Twitter @aish_java.

I'amore e la città

By Taskin Quagliani

The ivy traverses up the medieval wall, intertwined with the crumbling rubble
The sound of the accordion floats through the coastal air, the warmth still radiating from
bodies left out in the sun

The small, cobbled walkways hide whispers of lovers in their dark corners, brazen with
lust.

They hide from passers-by but the city sees everything. She watches the heated
exchanges, she hears the doors slam, she smells the basil potted on balconies and she
tastes a life of simple pleasures.

I think she's watching us now, do you see how her lights follow us as our shadows dance
behind us?

She hears our breath, heavy after the uphill climb

She smells the sea salt on bare skin

She tastes the erotically charged currents that tether us to one another

The streets hum with life, a song that most miss as they sift through the crowds

The sounds of feet clashing with the aged stone

The murmur of raucous festivities

The voice of an inebriated man professing his devotion to his innamorato

The call of eventide

But you, much like her, notice everything.

The expansion of a pupil suspended in a hazel tinted mirage

The bead of sweat leisurely trickling down a forehead

The limoncello that lingers in their mouth

The thumb that runs reassuringly over your own

The silence that drowns out the mundane rhythms

La dolce vita

Taskin is a South African with Italian and Asian lineage. Her diverse upbringing resulted in her trying to navigate a cultural landscape that felt extremely foreign. This spawned the love of expression through writing. Her interest with the literary arts lies in fictional prose pieces and she feels passionately about the creative arts as an outlet for all things wonderful and meaningful. She strives, through her writing, that others may experience a sense of being a part of the larger whole. She is currently studying towards a bachelor's degree in sociology.

Underneath Venus
By Gabriel Hendrix

It shall not work among the pages still told,
From the presence of magical beauty that bothers attention
As its peers and summons the sunrise, nor the spellbound
Of fifty men resting in shells, mass and gore of a skeleton,
Dripping and peeling the cells. Sculptured out of stone that begins
The seasonal changes and as spring returns instant war continues
Among waves settling down near rare colored stones, a blink of an eye
That responds with humanity receives tidal waves and leaving flesh
Along a bed full of divinity, immortal with red roses down the belly
Of a mother, to then birth one to create a thousand the mother of all nurtures
Piece in fine affections comfort, the hand carries a small pond up
Towards the open mouth, the eyes show dimensions piece by piece,
The blood resists the water and thus, a body is whole.

Gabriel X Hendrix is a writer from Orlando Florida. He's currently attending the University of Central Florida, where he will earn his B.A. in English. Hendrix's poems explore themes such as grief, sexuality, self-identity. Much of Hendrix's poetry has been featured in Silver Pinion Magazine, Kreaxxion Review, and among others.

Twitter @GabrielXHendri1 and instagram @gabriel.x.hendrix

The Shortest Season

By Lisa Lerma Weber

I see a cloud shaped like a spine,
arched like a lover
at the touch of the wind.
I watch as the cloud bends,
a lithe ballerina reaching out
for her partner's hand.
But the ballerina
doesn't stop reaching.
She extends and contorts
until she breaks apart
and I wonder if clouds feel pain.
I wonder if they soak up
all the anger and grief
we scream into the sky,
absorb until they explode
and return the storm to us,
pour it heavy onto our backs.
It's just another cycle.
I wonder if happiness
is the shortest season.

Lisa Lerma Weber lives in San Diego, CA. Her words and photography have appeared online and in print. She is a poetry contributor and junior editor for Versification. Follow her on Twitter @LisaLermaWeber

It is when we plant snake beans in this room

By Ismim Putera

It is when we plant snake beans in this room
 three straight rows of sprouting hope
 germinate under the withering sun
 vigorous tendrils crept along my
 scoliotic spine, strengthening it—vertically
 vines as crisp as your fingers
 latch on my back, like swamp leeches
 you like watching those curly pods
 elongate in the morning,
 while I water them with saltwater
 milk white flowers bloom behind my ear;
 you nibble it after you kiss
 my tomato red lips, and your
 oily sweat salves my sun-burnt chest
 hungry stomachs drum overnight
 we feed each other with spicy fondness
 cold breeze makes love precipitates in your eyes
 it becomes a sprinkle when I blink
 two men then hug each other
 in one sarong, sowing seeds—
 in dreams—
 a fist of water numbs the aching plight
 sun rays pinch our entangled legs
 and we laugh, coughing up spores
 snake beans mature into snakes
 crunchy lentils coil down to the earth
 we carry a rattan basket on our back
 and harvest the blessings hand-in-hand

Ismim Putera (he/him) is a poet and writer from Sarawak, Malaysia. His writing mainly focuses on sexuality, spirituality and mental health. His work has appeared in Anak Sastra, Ghost Heart Literary, Prismatic and forthcoming in Omelette magazine.

old summers, come back
By Hamnah Khan

On the delicious mornings of 2008, I tuck my white kurta under my knees and sink onto the crumbly dirt gathering on the balcony. My eyes, half drowsy, are fixed on the fruit tree under our apartment. Sometimes I would look out the wall-high window and see the grinning grass take a small peak at the sun and think: "This shyness of love doesn't belong to summers." But when nature fixes it's love on itself there's never too much we humans have to say. (Aren't we all but of this same earth too).

we continue to and braid motia,
their shape a smell that
sweetens the wrists.
the child in my eight-year old self still giggles.

oh, and then the years pass
and this arm of summer wraps
around me. there's a lofty smile
she plays with when the heavy
smell of mud rises in the air
slipping in and out
like the lights of a nearby streetlight.

am I moving apart from the trees
or are they getting estranged from me.

a loud wind comes in knocking on our bodies
like it knows us but we never recognize it,
it's not the wet air or the monsoon air or
the air that smells like ripened fruits picked
and set neatly in baskets.

i take a bite of the air
and it's as if i am eating a plate of food
right out of the oven. but it's never pleasant
just hot summer air making rounds of the streets.

arms of rain rapidly stomach the soil, eating it
before the sun-dried winds return to this land.
every newspaper heads with the line

*"this exclusive summer, the temperature tastes one degree higher
but we keep walking on the burning grass that smiles shy no longer"*

the summers are turning inclusive,
fearsomely holding each other closer

it's the summer of 2020 and my
blue-green-child-self returns inside
of my graying body with a strange knock.
she asks a question too soon for her:

why does the feral song of the trees
not sing tender to me? why does the ferocity
of the sparkled river-water and
lake-water not swim a hope into each day?
why did my moon-bird heart
wane too soon and rise too early?

in this loneliness she cried:
the world is you because
you are one and the world
is one but we all in our aloneness
feel like every hand connecting
us to each other has been towel-dried
and cleaned to the ends of every finger
no mud, no earth, no rain.

an endless impossibility of connection
screams out inside a bowl it makes of itself.

at the end of the day, a morning calling in late,
I look for the briefest moment at the white
shirts hanging on balconies, aside the bright
redness of tomatoes, swaying in the bluing sky.
something always stays,
even when it doesn't dare bring
the blue-green child-self back to me.

my past is late today
By Hannah Khan

I am standing on the train platform
and a sea is pouring into me.
a drip
a drop.
and then a sudden wave of shadows
run and jump at me like an old friend.

but they aren't old friends.

they are

 mouths splitting
 mouth splitting

 legs stretching
 legs stretching

 hands twisting
 hands twisting

clutching their knees –

if they are even there.

I hear a glitch in their hoard of voices

 a grieving laughter
 a grinning weep
 a giving gasping rage

see how formless they are,
shapes not bound to the physicality
of time or the measureless-ness of space.
coiling around me, I feel their surge carry
me forward and backwards, I am
slipping against the hands trying to
grip me.

I am a wave and not needed here
I have to be somewhere but it's
hard to remember where

(Line Break)

so, I zip them open from the
middle and they themselves turn and
cocoon themselves back into the
pit where the zip opens.

they wear themselves again like
an open wall ready to dissolve under
the half sun that looks from behind the sky.

here, the streets aren't lined in circles
nut in hexagons. Here the line that
stretches it's hand back into the pit inside
the zip of shadow-bodies does not
return back from its satiation.

yet, I stand still on this train platform,
when the train decides to slowly and
clumsily reaches to its station.
my past is late to visit me;
guilty smile, a light that
is shadowed unlike the bodies which
wrapped outside me (but not around me)
before.

my past self is still late in how she walks
too behind in everything i have become.

I still my steps every two paces forward
to let her stand right to my shoulder.

so, I tell her about the zip-shadow-bodies
and she tells me those are the ones
which are the non-ardent parts of me, lost
in some time where i had let my past-self
never walk beside her.

I wonder if there is a heart beating
somewhere inside that
shadow pit that opens with a zip

I ask my past-self
is it enough to find a flitting piece of home
when you stumble between each wind-breath?

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Hamnah is a Pakistani university student mostly found tucked in corners of libraries. She loves petting cats, reading, and fresh fruits. She also adores writing on human connections and history.

Socials: twitter - hamnahk8

Inmate #129002 Joshua Williams No. 97
By Keith Antar Mason

Paint him like a Goya with a warm sunlight

Face his eyes glistens with tears his mother left him uncut on his father's doorstep he grows hard

Golden sepia tones well formed muscles and mind thick knuckles Rodin style in his Hand a hardbound book more Brothers In Print Not In Prison The Warsaw Pact Italy takes his ribs

Ain't no constitution here

France owns his footwork

As he prowls his dark cell

Aroused a tatt'd cobra around his

Waist it'ss opened hooded mouth

Picassod 5 strikes on its head like

A hot humid greek wet dream a

prince albert dangles like vemon

His new lover/ being forgotten

Caresses as sharp purple bruises pain

England owns his memories

In a Mosside ghetto flat

He rolls a jailhouse joint

Thin but the Kush is strong

He feels it surge around his

Heart beat and throbbing in his

Broken bones

He's a Redduster food striker yellow
jacket hunger gone mute no justice no peace
No profits no euros either he arrives sorted
He remembers the Rothko sky
Being thrown back into the aegean
Numb suicide bomb in a life vest
His naked body floats discarded
By endless promises unkept

Hercules unwanted bastard Afer
Should have stayed in Atlas's mountain
A devil judas goat herder an extra in
A Hollywood film George Clooney
Would have seen he won an oscar
Playing George Floyd George Benson
Music the score as he stood naked
In the waiting cell for a blue gloved gaurd
To finger him for the anal probe cough
Welcome to Amerika sin noche sin Dias
Sin Noche Sin Dias star man wanted Aqui

Keith Antar Mason Is Artistic Director of The Hittite Empire Performance Art Collective. A failed catholic layman, a Harvard Book Award winner and he has performed at Festivals all over the UK and the US with the Hittite Empire. His work includes ...for black boys who have considered homicide when the streets were too much... New Wine & Black Men Feet. And Medusa Children

Ghost-Body
By Samuel Strathman

Title taken from the poem “Since When Shall Speak of It No More” by Carl Phillips.

Leave the windows open
after you exit,
air in.

After escaping,
a tuft of your hair
flips like the pages
of a diary, remnants
of squandered adolescence.

Perhaps loneliness
is freedom,
and transient relationships
are fragments shackled
to memory.

We scrape carapaces
but never reach
past surface level.

Burning bridges is a yawn
for the complacent, desecration
for the pawns trifled
from their squares.

What remains is unsacred,
a ghost-body –
as if neither individual
participated in the tirade
on their shells.

Samuel Strathman is a poet, author, educator, and co-founder/editor-in-chief of Floodlight Poetry. Some of his poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Briefly Write, Poetry Life & Times, and The Daily Drunk. His debut chapbook, “In Flocks of Three to Five” was published by Anstruther Press (2020). His second chapbook, “The Incubus” will be in print this fall (Roaring Junior Press, 2020).

Harvest Moon

By Robin Bissett

Over the past few months, I have not been sleeping well. The moon has become my closest companion.

At night, I trace my thumb along the beams that shine onto my wooden windowsill and envision groups of cosmic ghosts who roll cartwheels like tumbleweeds across the barren landscape.

I met Sadie at the Farmers Market a couple of weeks ago. She was selling homemade strawberry jam, packaged inside mason jars with checkered red cloth tops. Small curls escaped her loosely woven dark braids and a silver moon crescent necklace that encased a small yellow flower hung around her neck. She was so bright, even standing in the shade of her canopy, a welcoming gravity that drew me away from my inner cloudy corner.

There was a snoring pug who laid in a warm brown and beige bed to the side of her booth. His rolls spilled off him; he looked like he was idly melting. I walked up to him and scratched gently behind his little ears. She said his name was Isaac, short for Isaac Asimov.

I said, that's a good name, but kind of a mouthful for a little guy like him.

She laughed. Well he's got a lot to say. You learn to listen to him. See, he's making noise now.

And for a moment, we stood, side-by-side in silence, listening to Isaac's rhythmic snores before another customer wandered up behind me, fiending for homemade strawberry jam.

I, too, bought a jar of jam and asked Sadie for her number and we've been talking. Not just texting, but over the phone, too.

She stays up late like me. She sits and overthinks and writes down everything that spins and sparks in her brain.

Now, I have someone to talk to when it's getting late and when I can't sleep. Though I'm not sure how long it will last, or if it will, so far it has been nothing but pleasant. The moon has observed everything, and I swear, sometimes, I'll look up and catch it smiling alongside me.

Robin Bissett is a teaching artist and writer from Central Texas. She enjoys absorbing and sharing stories and strengthening her surrounding literary communities.

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Abroad in Korea

By Maria S. Picone

To live in a foreign country is:
to order chrysanthemum tea in a Dunkin' Donuts,
to ask for a bulgogi burger in a McDonald's,
to eat these staples in a school cafeteria:
fermented soybean broth/fermented briny cabbage
seaweed dragged in with the tide/fish that couldn't let go of the seaweed
purple rice, color of

dreams intuition Korean amethyst my elementary school backpack a girl's imagination

Dating is moving through space

By Maria S. Picone

On the dark urban concrete, you slipped,
resurfacing to the Tinder sea after a long
dive. It reminds you of launching into
galaxies of dead nights, colliding stars.
Without gravity, it's treacherous to swim.
Even in the puddles of a stranger's eyes,
you could drown. The aqua interplay,
splashing in the hotel pool brings back
the eau claire des merveilles your lover
hid at her wrist for you to breathe.
Years later, moored to another spacecraft
by a white hose, impervious to drift,
you recall diving into deep blue dark
matter dead stars floating by.

Maria S. Picone has an MFA from Goddard College. She's interested in hybrid and experimental forms as well as free verse. Her hobbies are learning languages, looking at cats on the internet, and painting. Her poetry appears in Mineral Lit Mag, Marias at Sampaguitas, and Cypress. Her Twitter is @mspicone, and her website is mariaspicone.com.

ਰੋਸਾ (rōsā)

- Resentment (f)

By D.Sohi

- ‘Don’t cry or show emotion.’
‘Why aren’t you upset for them?’
- ‘Be mindful of others’ feelings.’
‘They hurt you? So what.’
- ‘Respect hierarchy.’
‘Fight oppression!’
- ‘Study hard: grades determine your worth.’
‘Don’t work too hard, you stress too much.’
- ‘You’re not allowed to wear makeup.’
‘Stop ruining photos.’
- ‘Bad girls wear heavy makeup.’
‘You’re ugly.’
- ‘Stay away from men.’
‘Why aren’t you married yet?’
- ‘People will judge your showy outfit.’
‘Make an effort. No one likes plain girls.’
- ‘Get an education.’
‘Pick a local university.’
- ‘Where are you going and with whom?’
‘Why do you never go out?’
- ‘Only men can be drunk.’
‘Why aren’t you dancing?’
- ‘Stay away from men.’
‘When will you have children?’
- ‘Lose weight, you’re fat.’
‘You’re too skinny. *Eat.*’
- ‘Material obsession is wrong.’

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‘Make lots of money.’

- ‘Buy your own house.’

‘Unmarried women shouldn’t live alone.’

- ‘[After an explanation] Don’t answer back.’

‘Why don’t you talk?’

- ‘Be the best at everything.’

‘Why are you sad?’

- ‘Why can’t you be like them?’

‘Why are you sad?’

- ‘You can’t make dhāl/sabzī or tea? Useless.’

‘Why are you sad?’

- ‘No such thing as mental health.’

‘Why are you sad?’

//

Before doublespeak

Poisons you with rōsā,

- ਕਰੋ ਆਪਣੀ) Karō āpaṇī)*

ਕਰੋ ਆਪਣੀ) Karō āpaṇī)

And be free.

**Do your own thing*

'D. Sohi is a British-Indian writer and blogger, who also happens to be terrible at writing bios. While she has self-published her dystopian ebook *Borders*, she dreams of being mainstream-published (who doesn't?). In her spare time, she enjoys the Duo the Owl popping up and threatening her to use Duolingo.' Twitter: @DtheBee1 My website: <https://embracingaurorads.wordpress.com>

magical negress
By A.Martine

it's a misconception that the darkest skin won't bruise or blush or freckle
the realest sleight of hand: though made 'of color', you are in fact color-less
and suffering begets suffering ad nauseam till it burgeons enlightenment
'tell me when your childhood ended' vs 'this wisdom, it takes work, but pays'

but we know what's what. things get harsh-light the longer you stare them down
stardust wings are feet of clay. fear someone will kill me ugly, that i will die hard
if one walks with a fighting foot, one must tussle their way through life
and suffering begets not suffering: ad nauseam, and no burgeoning enlightenment

i woke up to my days with short fuse in hand and gainsaying, spitfire heart
and why shouldn't i be like a crazy person, why shouldn't i pitch my mast to sea
i'd like to live within means — a pilot's confidence to carry souls to safety
the realest sleight of hand: though made 'of color', you are in fact color-less

'don't tell me when your childhood ended, be the shoulder, the world's mammy'
a misconstruction: the darkest skin bruises blushes freckles bleeds most vividly
i want to open windows when it rains and awe my iridescent scales
i want to say i am doing my best, with my secret voice, and to my one-woman audience

when he asks you why you never speak up in group therapy

By A Martine

you could say:

back in school, when you knew the answers you wouldn't give them for fear of looking like a goody-two-shoes.

now you know not to give them, but the context — my has it changed.

who's the dandiest? who's the most disaffected? who would fail, and how, for being the teacher's pet?

you choose instead all the longs of the short:

because, just because.

because it's bad enough that you are bare, bad enough that you feel raw, the question — et tu? — a vivid klieg light on your injuries.

because you've been standing off with another quiet girl and you want to see who yields.

because at your most irritable you think you all sound like judy/punch marionettes, brawling like you're getting at something significant.

because stillness is your happy place and there's no non-prick way to say it.

because it means proving your cracks exist, deepest where they most revolt you — knowing or not knowing the depths of their cracks, and if they own them, and since when.

because you're going to have a disagreement, and earnestness will earn you nothing.

(and what does it even mean, group therapy, therapy for who, what group? do we all splinter the same, then? are we percentiles of a larger suffering? and why should we filter distinctions through generalities? and why should we meet each other halfway? and why should i busy with your questions when i have my own, like: why is it too much to ask to be seen for my personal fury?)

because it doesn't matter, and rumination is wastefulness: hurts coming up, hurts coming down.

because if you prove that last fact wrong, you'll have to reckon with what your lifelong misanthropy has robbed you of.

because you will say all the above and you'll be presented with two choices
leave the room and feign vindication
stew in post-outburst shame, knowing you look as childish as jim stark

doing chickie runs to prove he is a man.

A. Martine is a trilingual writer, musician and artist of color, and might have been a kraken in a past life. She's an Assistant Editor at Reckoning Press and co-EIC/Producer/Creative Director of The Nasiona. Her collection AT SEA, which was shortlisted for the 2019 Kingdoms in the Wild Poetry Prize is forthcoming with CLASH BOOKS. Some words found or forthcoming in: Déraciné, The Rumpus, Moonchild Magazine, Marías at Sampaguitas, Luna Luna, Bright Wall/Dark Room, Pussy Magic, South Broadway Ghost Society, Gone Lawn, Boston Accent Lit, Anti-Heroin Chic, Cosmonauts Avenue, Tenderness Lit. @Maellstrom/www.amartine.com.

AFRICAN TIME

By Mohammed Salihu

*Our god was anglicized
And enchanting beads banished for alphabets.*

*"Apes Obey!" they commanded
And we drank to stupor.*

*We became arts for exhibition
with no credits for the future.*

*They finally left us in the rusted hands of our 'heroes'
And we celebrated in diverse colors.*

*We were raped and impregnated
Poverty, Corruption and Corona now our Bastard Children.*

*But for how long would we whore around spirits of a different kind?
Are we not proverb enough to serve our ethical purposes?
Are we not medicine enough for our ailments?
Are we not art enough to mend our broken destiny into a mosaic?*

*It is time to blow our wind of grace
let it raise the soils and build an empire.
It is the African time.*

Mohammed Salihu is a young Nigerian author, poet and student. Some of his works have appeared in Allpoetry, Unicef Voices of youth and elsewhere. Mohammed is also a positive agent for change. He is a user of Unicef Voices of Youth, a reporter of U - Report Global and the author of; Dearest Sunset'' His mantra to live by is a powerful quote: 'I am stronger than my pain''
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For Girls Who Saw fire

By Timi Sanni

Seven men carry their fires into a sacred valley

into a mount built on aged rocks

into the holy chambers of a temple

& leave a litre of blood in its wake

Crimson blood splattering

Into a painting of torn innocence

Into karma waiting

while cries ravages the night-time air

Eleven men feed their hungry gods

the broken pieces of a child's dream,

A morning sun is snatched

From the garment of the sky

Like a firefly caught

Between the hands of the death within a boy

She tries to glow

But light is a betrayer

& darkness is the reality that envelopes her

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(Line Break)

Thirteen men hide dynamites within their bodies

Waiting to explode into the sacredness of a place

Where a sun fell at noon

Hollow mouths that do not know silence

Barren gourds making loud thumps

With mouths alien to justice

A girl sees fire dance

And is consumed in its inferno

As beauty becomes smoke and memories

A girl knew too late

What it means to live

In the memory of living

Timi Sanni is a Nigerian writer and literary enthusiast. His works have been published or are forthcoming in various literary journals like Radical Art Review, African Writers, Rather Quiet, Praxis Magazine, Nanty Greens and elsewhere. His works often addresses emotions and truth. He recently won the Spring Poetry Contest and is the recipient of the Fitrah Review Prize for Fiction 2020. He is an editor at Kalopsia lit and Upwrite magazine. Twitter: @timisanni