

Fahmidan Issue Two.

November 2020

Fahmidan Journal

Issue 2: November 2020

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Clusters:**By Zahirra Dayal.**

Fatima awoke to the sound of police sirens and high heels stabbing the pavement outside. Her body was still warm from her dream of being encircled in her grandmother's arms. Dread slid slowly down into her stomach as she became aware of where she was, like a windscreen slowly defogging. Her henna painted toes wriggled from the top of the tattered brown blanket. Rays of light from under the worn curtain sliced the room revealing black mould spores on the walls and peeling paint. Chip-sized pieces of green paint and older unrecognisable stains peppered the beige carpet where a body lay wrapped like a corpse. The faint smell of urine laced the air and she quickly covered the ring of yellow already deepening and drying on the white bed sheet. The cold winter air spreading around the unheated room raised the hair on her bare arms. Grabbing her uniform, she bumped her knee into the empty wooden cot squeezed in near the door of the tiny room. A sharp pain shot through her leg.

'Where's your brother, did you wake him, is he still in the room?' snapped her mum who was holding her baby sister Zahra in one hand and a steaming saucepan with the other. Fatima opened her mouth, then shut it again, unsure of which question to answer first.

'Sit. Eat. Quickly, quickly!' cried her mum, hurling the baby at her. Baby Zahra clung to her black school jumper while Fatima tried to swallow the hot food. The dry bread and cubes of beef sank heavily, settling in an unwieldy mass with the dread already at the bottom of her stomach. Suddenly, her head was wrenched back. She felt the hard bristles of the brush raking her scalp. Then, cold drops of oil trickled down her scalp. The heavy scent of coconut and amla smothered the kitchen air. Strong hands kneaded and pressed her unyielding skin to distribute the oil. A comb cut a geometric path down the middle and her head twisted and turned as each section was plaited. With her tiny fingers, Baby Zahra touched the tears Fatima tried to blink back. The ritual ended with the elastic bands which were tightly wound around the ends of each plait; each strand of hair now corralled into place.

Her brother Hassan emerged from the room, hair unbrushed.

'Come on slowcoach!' he sniped, playfully tugging one of her plaits.

The pair walked to the 133 bus stop along the High Street already crowded with circles of uniform-clad children. Fatima's heart beat faster and her mouth felt dry as she surveyed the area with the clusters around her. She felt the icy air perforating the skin on her face. She could taste the undigested chunks of beef coming up and swallowed great gulps of air to keep it down. Her brother had already ran ahead to join his friends.

The 133 approached and the clusters merged for a while as they stampeded to get a place. A tall girl shoved her away to get on. A sea of voices and bodies followed, flooding past her. Every time she tried to step on, she was forced to move aside. When she finally got on, the bus driver's rugged face yelled,

'Come on young lady, are you getting on today or not?'

Fatima not recognising that it was a rhetorical question replied,

'Yes please saaar am coming today.' A loud eruption of unkind nasal laughter broke the silence.

The interior of the bus resembled the clustered playground at school. The bigger the circle, the more powerful it was. It was simple mathematics. Fatima found a spot near a woman hovering protectively over her pushchair. As the bus turned the corner, someone sniffed loudly and a voice from behind her bellowed,

Ewwwww, what's that awful smell guys?'

Fatima's heartbeat quickened like a caged bird, she knew what was coming.

'It must be Fart ma!' A choir of unkind voices laughed on cue.

'What's that in her hair? It stinks!' and another explosion of laughter ensued.

Fatima lowered her eyes to avoid the chain of eyes from the circles. Thousands of pins pricked her skin. They started on her face, arms and then spread to her legs. She kept very still.

A warm hand touched her shoulder and the pinpricks in her arm began to dissolve. Her brother and his three friends had formed a circle around her. She was safe for now, encircled in a cluster.

•

Bio: @ZahirraD is a teacher, writer and mother of a strong-willed 11-year-old. She has lived in Zimbabwe, South Africa, The UAE and the UK. When she is not teaching mixed conditionals and past participles or trying to get her son to eat his spinach, she can be found roaming the streets of London armed with a notebook and pen ready to record fragments of conversations or her observations of people. She is currently reading 'The Book of Not' by Tsitsi Dangaremba and 'Azadi' by Arundhati Roy both of whom she deeply admires.

Real:

By Vinny Topp

Your imagination runs amok
like an angry Silver back in a matchstick village
Isolating the blues and its guitar
To a place on the other side of lonesome river
Always pretending is very exhausting
It eats away the life force, bleeds the lifeblood
If pretending is an art form
We have a word of masters
Lip-read the truth
In a mute world of actors
Making you feel like a ghost at an abandoned séance
When today's face is lost to a closing door
Is the truth more terrifying, Than the face of a lie
The thought of a new dawn
Always honest, never perfect
Always honest, braver, real.

•

Bio: 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 @fahmidanjournal issue 1, @TheRuntZine 11, Poetry Now, Quantum Leap.

Twitter @vgtopp

Instagram vinnytopp

Blog meamvin.blogspot.com/

Lines of Separation:

By: David Hay

Two worlds collide then collapse. The stain between the sheets left a lifetime before
has been purified with tears. The promised spring never rises and the drudgery of each heavy Northern
hour weighs like a giant corpse upon the city skyline. He is out, apart, distinct. He is searching for
definition,

Meaning,

Purpose,

Alcohol

Sex,

Oblivion.

He is sixteen; he knows no better and I cannot help him. He moves with shadowy precision beyond my
aging view— when he steps outside without me I cease. I will never know him and he won't realise until
his age isn't a collection of promises but an acceptance of disappointments, that I am and always will be,
a stranger. We don't talk because we can't talk; we cling to our secrets, to our lines of separation,
knowing one false step risks our mutual destruction. We exist in different times; I am too occupied with
our past, he is concerned only with his future. But his future will not be what he imagines – it never is –
but I remain quiet, hoping against hope to be wrong. Forty-eight years I have known the changing colour
of the sky and the routine disillusionment found in the midst of every working hour. I have loved,
married, divorced, embraced my freedom, my loneliness, become stuck in routine, in stagnation, in
illusion, then surrendered in middle age, with death devouring my margins, into the latter phase of love,
and believe me no matter what you do, your always fucked.

I have faced the loaded gun of teenage years and survived. I have buried my grandparents and my mother.

I have lost friends, who formed the core of my adult life. I have learnt how to be numb. I have lived beyond you— my world has become you but it was not always you. The thoughts that made me, I can no longer distinguish clearly. Time drowned them and left me here, and my feelings continually fall as dead as the cliché struck brain. If I live to see you reach as many years as I have lived, I will know each seed of your character, but your life will never be mine.

A mother is always dissatisfied. Love binds us through and beyond our earthly time. If nature keeps its word, you shall bury me and you will know regret and I will feel nothing. But our lives are a catalogue of inevitable human failures— there is nothing we can do but speak with every nerve exposed and love one another for time is always passing and will one day be lost. Images without context will remain— my voice will fade then disappear. His memories of me will fragment, the more he tries recall them, and when he tries to explain their significance, his children will listen bored and think only of their future. He will know me better then— not complete. My borders are edgeless but it is not a question of learning too late, only through that limitless silence, that follows in the wake of each end can you understand.

Finality is trapped momentarily in the corner of my eyes. The sun is falling unhindered and you will return, stinking of stale smoke, covering your unbearable anxieties, with monosyllables and shrugs, scoffing down a cheese sandwich, before retreating to you airless hollow, immersed in your collages of porn. The world is breaking you. It has no real use for you—you will rectify or you will collapse and I will love you— a love never altering— consistent. But you are stepping beyond me and I must learn to let go, but I am stuck to you. Everyday without you will be incomplete— a mistake I'm unable to correct. As you rise, I will fall and I will content myself with the odd phone call and the supermarket flowers on mother's day.

Tragic. Predictable. Accepted. Cherished. Maybe you will come down in search of food or drink and sit down and watch a film with me, and I will watch you take every detail in. I will savour the seconds and give no mind to plot; you will be consumed with your every thought and I will love you, love you, love you. And I will be desperate, smiling, hooked.

•

Bio: David Hay is an English Teacher in the Northwest of England. He has written poetry and prose since the age of 18 when he discovered Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* and the poetry of John Keats. These and other artists encouraged him to seek his own poetic voice. He has currently been accepted for publication in *Dreich*, *Abridged*, *Acumen*, *The Dawntreader*, *Versification*, *The Stone of Madness Press*, *The Fortnightly Review*, *Nine Muses Poetry*, as well as *The New River Press 2020 Anthology*. You can follow him @Arched_Roadway.

Day 17:

Noeme Grace C. Tabor-Farjani

“What is Home Quarantine? This is the voluntary “home isolation” of individuals, without signs and symptoms, who came from COVID-affected countries for the past 14 days.” —*Bureau of Quarantine, Philippine Department of Health*

Day 17

I stopped counting the numbered days—6 days left before Ramadan, 2 days before Ma’s birthday, 37 days have passed since the last party. It was my firstborn’s birthday. I have 64 days of accumulated fats, totaling to 10 pounds. Is today Sunday?

Then there is that one day drizzled with hope that comes with rain. And yet I thought, here I am, writing about a life so grand—lounging, laughing, careless, carefree—while there is someone I know actually living that life almost at my reach until this quarantine.

There is that one day when Sun took its turn to mother us, heat drying the deluge, I thought to myself, Dishes and suds and running water, things still get done without me. There has always been order.

There is that one day that seems to have stayed. I sing promises of peace while mixing dough, mingling with the dirty dishes, I smile the longing away, the back ache goes, too. Soon after I asked for His hands. Things still get done.

That one day I understand I can sit and watch or take part on getting things done. I think that made me sing and smile more often. Knowing my hands play along with destiny. Trusting... but it need not win, I need not win.

That one day I learn. It is fine to not count them. Or unbox them. Or welcome them. Or ignore them. Cover them under blankets—the birthday parties, the hours, the grocery lists, the children’s future.

It is all fine. I stop counting days. Yesterday, so it stepped in the palm of my hands. Bid, do what I want. Tomorrow is here. Yesterday, my life has begun.

Bio:Noeme Grace C. Tabor-Farjani has authored *Letters from Libya*, a chapbook of short memoirs about her family's escape from the Second Libyan Civil War in 2014. Her poems have recently appeared and/or are forthcoming in *Your Dream Journal*, *Global Poemic*, *Luna Luna*, *Rogue Agent*, *433 Magazine*, and *Agapanthus Collective*. In 2018, she successfully defended her PhD dissertation on flow psychological theory in creative writing pedagogy. In between gardening and yoga, she teaches humanities at the high school level in the Philippines. She is currently working on a chapbook of poems on spirituality and the body. You can find her on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/noeme.g.c.tabor>.

End SARS:

By Ayanfe

Bloody circumstances
We were the perfect guard.
Sworn to uphold honour.
Serve, and protect, with integrity.
We were fashioned to be priceless.
We came out being auctioned.
Greed, imprison us all!
Worshippers of coin,
Worshipping the highest bidder.
A tool of oppression,
To the owners of the coin.
Body armor to the rich,
Body bags to the poor.
The human want is insatiable,
Our taste for blood was impeccable.
We became distasteful to the ones,
Who worship our taste.
Circumstances, for victim of circumstances.
Looks: cadaverous
Stench: odoriferous.
We could see hatred.
It kills faster, than the bullet.
The voices of our victim.
Crippled, our sense of belonging.
We became lost in our hatred.

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Rejected by the masses.

Deactivated by the authority.

Bloody circumstances.

End SARS

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Bio: Ayanfe is a Writer, Researcher and a poet. He has written several poems on the reality of Nigeria. The poem 'EndSARS' captured the reality of police brutality in Nigeria. He lives in Ibadan, Nigeria.

Almost 70,000

By Anthony Aguero

Almost 70,000

deaths in the U.S. from drug overdoses

A procession of clipped wings
loves you on the way to them.

Once, the North American continent
filled the air with toxic gas &
one by one the birds fell:
Goldfinch, pigeon, robin, Ruby-
throated hummingbird, dove &
crow, so many svelte crows —
all 70,000 birds, gone.

By the end of 2018 the tears of those
left-behind filled the oceans and lakes
and rivers. A procession of waters
loves you on the way to them.

A beautiful bird perched itself onto my
windowsill, once, and I cried knowing
it was you, all of you.

•

Bio: Anthony Aguero is a queer writer in Los Angeles, CA. His work has appeared, or will appear, in the Bangalore Review, 2River View, The Acentos Review, The Temz Review, Rhino Poetry, Cathexis Northwest Press, 14 Poems, Redivider Journal, Maudlin House, and others.

Instagram & Twitter: shesnotinsorry

The Postcard Speaks:

By Nachi Keta

Someone has written a love letter on me. It says he misses her and would come to meet her soon. I am confused. "Why didn't he text her, or a call would have been better." I nudge an envelope beside me. It is light blue and has a stamp from Karachi. I am from India. On my back, there is a dhobi ghat- two naked children holding knives. And women are thumping clothes on cemented waterways. I know I am not as pretty as the ones with Venice. But I am proud of myself.

I ask her- "Tell me what's written on you? Let's discuss what messages we carry on our bodies. In fact, let us make a festival. All the letters in the post office. It might be fun sharing stories. The postmaster will come in the morning and we might never see each other again. Let's celebrate the momentary intimacy we are forced to enjoy. Who knows, we might be dead by tomorrow."

Karachi does not reply. It is dark, but we can see each other because we, letters, don't need light to see. I hear an owl's shriek. Now I ask the one lying over my body the same question. An inland from Siliguri.

I continue asking everyone thus the whole night. No one replies. As if none of them suffers from the Insomnia of love.

The next morning I wake up looking at the face of a boy who had put me in a letterbox in Andheri. I remember his face- angular, with a soft brush of mustache and ocean blue eyes. I remember he was crying when he delivered me. It was an early morning hour. Quiet. The world was too slow. I even remember that I didn't have a good night's sleep.

The boy picks me up and goes out in the sun, where the postmaster waits. He had a powdery mustache on his lips. They stutter when he speaks as if once he had a stroke. A broad-rimmed pair of glasses over his eyes. "You traveled all the way from Mumbai to Delhi only to stop me from delivering this letter?" he says.

The boy does not reply in words.

He splints my body into two, and then four, and then... sixty-four pieces of my body lay on the ground of the post office now. To be swept away with the message I was carrying.

After a few centuries, the ghost of the post office welcomes me into its worlds. He explains - "His grandmother died today. He has come here to carry her body back to Mumbai where her husband awaits, the one who had written on you. He had a stroke after he got to know about her. They will meet us soon."

•

Bio: A dropout of various institutes Nachi Keta is a Kidney Transplant Recipient and a neurodiverse writer from New Delhi. His name is a combination of two terms: Nachi, which means 'death', and Keta, which means 'a creative force'. His work focuses on mental health, oppression and the absurd in social and personal. His words have found a home in various magazines like Perhappened, The daily drunk, The Bombay Review, The Howling Press and Sock Drawer, an updated list of which can be found here: nachi-keta.com.

Recycle:

By Stephen J. Golds

I go to restaurants
and bars we went.
Sit there at an empty table,
an empty glass in my empty hand.
Wanted to remember how it was
but I can't.
I've tried.
Nothing comes.

I ride the subway around the city.
Always end at the beginning.
No way out.
Wanted to get away,
see something new
but I can't.
I've tried.
Nothing comes.

I lay in the beds of others
while they breath out
softly into an unmoving night.
My eyes never close. Just darkness.
Wanted to love

(Line Break)

but I can't.
I've tried.
Nothing comes.

There's pain, a bright blade
in the hollowness of my guts.
Unremovable. Unremitting.
Unrequited.
Wanted to hate
but I can't.
I've tried.
Nothing comes.

I'd like to cry or laugh.
Baptisms for ghosts.
Imagine it would be a relief.
All things brought anew.
Wanted to grieve, move on
but I can't.
I've tried.
Nothing comes.

I question
which one of us is dead?
Who died on that humid summer day?
Cutthroat and tongue tied.

(line break)

Wanted to know

but I can't.

I've tried.

Nothing comes.

•

Bio: Twitter: SteveGone58

Stephen J. Golds was born in London, U.K, but has lived in Japan for most of his adult life. He enjoys spending time with his daughters, reading books, traveling, boxing and listening to old Soul LPs. His novel Say Goodbye When I'm Gone will be released by Red Dog Press in October 2020 and another novel Always the Dead will be released by Close to The Bone Press January 2021

Blending Worlds:

Jason de Koff

The coffeehouse was filled with its usual aroma,
and the baristas, with their subtle coatings of bean dust,
led the concert of brew town sounds,
as the night ushered in crowds of customers.

Viewing the scene from the street outside,
heightened the anticipated warmth within,
and made the cold wind blow colder,
faster, and bolder than any other time of the year.

Entering was a warm embrace,
and the rush of sound,
created a holiday dinner atmosphere,
that surrounded the booths and tables.

Caffeine-laced fingers,
tremble across a computer keyboard,
as new worlds are born or die,
by the artist's hand.

Completing his memory of the dream,
in pictorial display on the cave wall,
the hunter stoked the fire,
anticipating the new day breaking.



Bio: 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 40 poems published or forthcoming in literary journals this year.

My social media:

Twitter: @JasonPdK3

Humanesque:

By Kristin Garth

Unique unit — gilled humans in tanks will
require more privacy, to be quite frank —
the term “water closet fits roles it fills,
(elimination, attire) two rooms flanked.

Design minimalistic, too small to hide —
a toilet, shower, wardrobe, beside, all
babydoll dresses, space not too wide.
reduces time exhibit’s behind walls.

Claustrophobia cajoles coy creatures
out to girlarium glass. Good design
dictates decorum. Does not ask. Features
a fish such as this, the rarest of finds,

whose humanesque needs I entertain
impatient each second she is detained.

Bio: 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 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

Appraisal:

By Hadley-James Hoyles

Egg-timer, egg-shaped with egg-like

Cracks around the crown.

Nestled neatly in a tin cup

Battered and giving up the ghost

Of the constituent plastics beneath

The allure of the surface.

A loyal drillmaster, a guardian of precise

Instances, of rises, falls, incantations

Over a weathered sheet of graph paper.

The purpose, a jolly hour in the darkness.

Working blade, lambfoot, best of the bunch,

A worthy aide to a legion of stolid

Foxes, curlews, moorhens and wolves

Scattered along the dynasty, sponges for

Altering memories, set to be shared

And improvised as the snow closes in.

Warped and bruised quarto folder, edges swelled

And nipped from this or that, reaching

Out to edges and pallid souls

Stretched from a harvest of

Squalid dimensions, a feast on the mind

And the field. The tenants

Crowded and heaped alongside

Their tangents and extensions and edits

Never out, never to be seen by other eyes

‘Til the house is silent, and the cousins come through.

•

Carving:

By Hadley-James Hoyles

Confidence grows
Lines are pulled through, etched
Out of existence. The dimensions
Of a story are kneaded on the business end
Of a shapeshifter.
Riotous colours bedeck the surface
Yet to be unbound, not connected
At the moment with the raw, oxidising flesh
Beasts can murmur in its larynx, guided strides
Meandering through, among, around
The onlooker.

A rub, an instinctive mothering
In spite of the mantras, to
Make it as it would be. No need
For concern, a hearty dig has started
The attacking anew and the eyes
Are all the truer.
Leaves don the dermals, as the fountain
Glubbers forth to the tandem
Pendulum swings
Of a faraway noose.

The strings tighten, the limp light retracts
The evening is witness
The totem is born.



Bio: Hadley-James Hoyles is a poet and teacher from North Yorkshire, based in Edinburgh, Scotland. He writes of the natural world and its effect on the human mind, as well as the ghosts of the past which re-emerge periodically in our own lives. His first pamphlet will be published next year.

Endurance, 1946:

By Robert Okaji

Unaware of the day's movements, she paints her
reply to the bracelet of light flaring above

the horizon. Tomorrow's edict is *gather*,
as in retrieving a sister's bones in black

rain, reassembling in thought
a smile that could not endure despite

its beauty. *I seek a place
of nourishment and find empty bowls.*

What is the symbol for peace, for planet?
How do we relinquish the incinerated voice?

Under the vault of ribs lie exiled words, more
bones, and beneath them, relentless darkness.

And whose bodies mingle in this earth?
Whose tongue withers from disuse?

(Line Break)

*The eight muscles react to separate stimuli,
four to change shape and four to alter position.*

Turning, she places the brush on the sill
and opens the window to the breeze.

Exit the light, exit all prayer. Ten strokes
form breath. She does not taste the wind.

•

Bio: Robert Okaji is a displaced Texan seeking employment in Indiana. The author of five chapbooks, his work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Taos Journal of International Poetry & Art*, *As Above So Below*, *Slippery Elm*, *Atlanta Review*, *Vox Populi* and elsewhere.

Autumns of the loop:

By Kushal Choudhary

Human history's been the redness of trampled leaves,
of an autumn blurring the face of sweat and disease.
Betraying, weathered lids of the eyes, sunken
And abolished the bark
So stout and branches thin in line, ill-fatedly drunken

The plough in an evergreen technology, only grieve
Her tangible breasts at him, they shout and weep
the desecrated fields of muddy legs and children on her back
Use the dried up failures of a history, bodily betrayed and left

The wind god tamed by the thunder justified the moral plunder, of metal earthing on the roof
“Trees, nor brown leaves can grow but forever cycle”
The hatred of her children aloof, for the leaves are burnt to ashes, a economic incineration, death by
pathologic displacement
far too strong for the malleable bones of weaker branchings

Recurring, admittedly sprout of the pavement of the park
and sinews of thicker muscles; bigger trees shed more, bleed
sicker
Onto the ravaged bodies of misery, ploughed into inexistence

•

Bio: Kushal Choudhary is a writer based in Varanasi, India. He is interested in socio-political writing and has published essays for few online websites. He is also interested in poetry writing that deals with the confusions and desperations that come along with the fact that one who writes is also the one who vigorously ponders, to the point of harming one's self and identity, against the conditions of the society and its politics. Twitter: @kushapitfall and Instagram: @iisubhaiya

The Things We Don't Talk About

By Ibrahim Williams

I was eleven when mum handed me over to Ustadh¹ Jamil. Father had complained, two days earlier, that it was unheard of for a Muslim child to be in the dark about requisite knowledge of the deen². And I caused it. I goofed when at the mosque, Uncle Alim -the nosy elder- pushed me forward during Asr³ prayer to call the athan⁴. Silence. I wheeled my eyes around the twenty-something worshipers present -soaked in my own panic as I searched for a saviour. None. Father stared at me behind his rectangular blue frame -expectant. I grabbed the mic, but it slipped. I placed my hands over my left ear, trying very hard to save that part of me from witnessing the humiliation I wooed. That day, I called the worst athan the whole of Lagos had ever heard and father became furious. He snatched the mic from my sweaty hands and pushed me to the children's corner.

//

At the entrance of the Madrasa⁵, I winced, bewitched with perspiration & anxiety, as mum opened the black gate which revealed an unpainted, rowdy and grotesque one-storied building. In the compound, the evening breeze worsened my plight. It blew about me with a strong foul odour. It must have been excreta, I thought. Mum marched me forward, towards two men in flowing white gowns -which I later learnt is called *Jalabia*. The first man, fair, lanky, poised with full thick beards covering his tiny jaws was the vice-principal. Ustadh Jamil was not as tall, didn't have that much beard, but knew the most effective way to make an erring student cry. He looked at me, sizing me from head to toe -he must have wondered why I was that fat. But I didn't care. When our eyes met, I expressed my honest opinion about him and his Madrasa. It was hate at first sight.

Things started off as I expected -badly. Yoruba was the language of instruction, and mine was terrible since English had always been my first language. As a result, the students turned me into their subject of laughter by mocking me in a local language that sounded terribly foreign. At home, I complained to dad about all these and other despicably unnatural things the boys do in the Madrasa, but he said nothing.

One day, during class, Ustadh Jamil pointed his long cane at me.

-Awwal, he called. Recite the Arabic alphabet and their phonetic synonyms.

-I'm sorry Ustadh, I don't know it, I responded blandly.

-Three weeks in my class and you don't know the Alphabets and their phonetic synonyms?

His face changed colour as he straightened his long cane.

-Come here you fat monkey, he roared.

I starred at his advancing body, my forehead wet with fear.

As I ran out through the wooden door of the class, I thought of two options. The second was most appealing. To get to the toilet was to pass beneath the dreaded staircase where other Ustadh sits to make their libations. There, they burn the head of red lizards, smoke-dried rats and mash them together before sun-drying them for one spiritual need or the other. I met Sheikh Goro⁶ who was seated on one of the cow skins fingering his board of fine brown sand. He was doing *Hizabi* -a consultation with the spiritual realm through addition or subtraction of a person's birth date, age and the merging of other personal details to various astrological signs. His client jumped up in fear as I thudded past them. I made the last turning into the toilet area of the Madrasa -breathless- but alert to the flip-flop sounds of my pursuer.

Two older boys walked out from the toilet, both adjusting the rope-belts of their trousers as they twined eyes in a silent conversation -oblivious of my presence. Adam reached for Nuh's crotches,

-I think you should chill for that to soften up.

//

The second time I told father all I had seen, he slapped me hard in annoyance, angered that I made such gory story up.

Amidst tears, I told him, Dad, Wallahi, it happened.

Footnote

1. Ustadh: Teacher
2. Deen: (Islamic) religion
3. Asr: Afternoon prayer
4. Athan: The Muslim call-to-prayer
5. Madrasa: A school where people go to learn about the religion of Islam
7. Sheikh: An honorific title in Arabic. It means elder.

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Bio: Ibrahim Williams is a Nigerian writer, poet, and satirist whose works have appeared in Nantygreens, SerotoninPoetry, Punocracy, Dream Walking, Tell. Africa and elsewhere. He is a postgraduate student of the English language at the University of Lagos, Nigeria. Find him on Twitter @ibn_williams7

Proustian Pain:

By: Tuur Verheyde

An eve of Summer wears its pregnant smell,

Like devils wear their ravished skin,

Scarlet and shining,

Malice seducing while licking its lips.

The odour is a Proustian perversion.

And beyond the shroud

There are bulls of steel

And curling dragons.

I look beyond the Ocean's lip,

Past Paris and New York,

Past outrage and anger,

Past love and forgiveness,

words which bled out

Into dreams.

And I cannot see you.

I lost you all on the way to Avernus.

Before its spiced vapours reach me now,

The Lethe must have come to you.

And now I sense the price of memory.

The evening smells of better times,

Brings loss through the scent

Of a potent past.

A past lost by my hand.

I remember,

And mourning soothes

A restless breath.

On we move,

Fahmidan Issue Two.

November 2020

As the breeze blows

(Line Break)

The Proustian pain

Into a distant sun.

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Bio: Tuur Verheyde is a twenty-three-year-old Belgian poet. 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

Dictation of a Drowning

Leah Holbrook Sackett

The outside world is blaring. Inside there is a cacophony of voices. Sometimes these voices are contained in my head, and sometimes they are projected. I wander from room to room, trying to catch just what they are saying. It sounds like a distant airing of national public radio.

I've gone in hospital where someone else can care for me as I can hardly be concerned with myself. Questions tumble about inside me. Why? What's the point? Do these meds even work? It's a long, slow suffering death this illness. Yes, it is often terminal. It is quite like drowning. Most people think suicide and drowning will mean a big display of thrashing. But like drowning, suicide is usually quiet, unseen, and painful.

Inside the hospital, the days built slowly to nothing and receded with the night watch. With the Sun comes a refresh of sedation, and coloring pages are the leaves of the day. It was a boon to go to the cafeteria for bland food and plastic spoons. It was impossible to cut the meat. If you were on suicide watch, you had to stay behind and wait for a tray grown cold, like this was in any way helping the situation. I remember no names. It doesn't matter. I was one of a penal colony submerged in waves of drugs.

I went inside voluntarily. I was suicidal with plans and needed help. I don't like to write that truth. I am ashamed and humiliated. I was body checked with two females present. I felt violated, like a criminal. Their body identification fed my desecration. They were amazed at my lack of scars and tattoos. I was detached and compliant; my dignity slipped off like an old skin. I hadn't brought anything with me. So, they gave me paper towel scrubs to wear while I waited. I left my purse with my husband. He brought back a bag filled with off-limits items: clothes with drawstrings, stuffed animal, plush slippers, belts, pillow, blanket, and personal hygiene products like toothpaste, shampoo, and conditioner. Other things were kept under their lock and key: the clothes I came in, jewelry I forgot to give to my husband, and acne face wash. There were more things we could not have, like the battery for the remote control to the TV in the community room, which given the season of Halloween, resulted in slasher films all day. The week before, someone had swallowed the remote control battery in a suicide attempt. When it was smoke break time, smokers could have lighters, but my stuffed animal was off-limits? No one had abused the lighters; while, stuffed animals were well beyond my imagination as to their lethal capabilities, other than suffocation, which could just as easily be accomplished by one of the flat pills.

This was getting well? Under the blare of the TV horror screams, the camera shots of splattered blood, we would play pick-up games of hangman's noose. Occasionally, there was group therapy; it involved a middle-aged woman reading a worksheet to disinterested patients. Too bad, I'm not deaf. Art therapy was worse. It included paper plates with dry, crackling brown leaves and Elmer's glue like we were five years old. I'm mentally ill, not stupid. This was my autumn. Meth addicts were familiar and alcoholics, too. Sobriety was not my issue, so often, the group therapy did not apply to me. I have bipolar disorder. Did anyone want to talk about that? Any advice on that? I understand that the DSM-5 identifies drug addiction as a mental illness. To start, drug addicts willingly took drugs. I did not take Bi-polar. It happened to me; my body betrayed itself. This seemed like a vast, insulting difference.

Other inmates, in for depression and suicidal thoughts, were more helpful than the majority of the staff. The orderlies were friendly and never condescending, I'll give them that. The doctors could hardly be reached. I guess they were so busy with their other doctor's duties that they didn't have time to talk to patients. From my perspective, this was not helping, just holding, like a prisoner in transfer. I wanted to go home. I wasn't healing. I was sedated.

My medication was a juggling act. Mental help was a myth. They don't know. They guess. The good ones treat patients as humans. The rest of the staff, just earning paychecks, watched us sink and then threw more drugs at us. These pills were a jettison of empty promises. I opened my mouth and inhaled deep waters.

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Bio: Leah Holbrook Sackett's debut book, *Swimming Middle River*, was published with REaD Lips Press in 2020. Additionally, her short story, *The Family Blend*, was nominated for a Pushcart Prize with *Crack the Spine*. Leah's work has won various awards such as: the Gold Award in Art Ascent, Two Sisters Publishing Contest, and she was the recipient of Institute for Women and Gender Studies: Creative Writing Award. Over 50 of Leah's stories have appeared in literary journals. She is an adjunct lecturer at the University of Missouri - St. Louis. This is where she earned her M.F.A.

LeahHolbrookSackett.website.

Interview with a Ghost:

By Nadia Gerassimenko

In gratitude to Yusuf Akman

Are you here?

Close.

What are you?

I am nothing. I am everything.

Who are you?

I float fluid.

When were you as the bullet fragmented your heart?

Between laughter & a gasp.

Are you alone?

Trapped in echo chamber.

Are you lonely?

Touch me.

Whom do you love?

Her cherry lips haunt me in loops.

Do you regret anything?

I rage against the dying & for my dead.

Do you want revenge?

But, life always shows the end in line.

Where do you go from here?

I circle counter-clockwise, rewinding time.

Will you always be here?

Don't forget me.

Bio: Nadia Gerassimenko is the Founder and Editor-in-Chief of *Moonchild Magazine*, a dreamy, experiential online publication and friendly, inclusive community of moonchildren, former Managing

Fahmidan Issue Two.

November 2020

Editor at *Luna Luna Magazine*, freelancer in editorial services, writer, poet, and visual artist.

Under the Influence:

By Taskin Quagliani

Honey-glazed skin.

Hazel toasted irises in a pool of sangria under heavy, dark eyelashes.

The smell of the carnal uncharted.

That idle head roll, an unmistakably sensual motion.

Her neck that moves like a snake coaxed from its sanctuary.

The warmth scatters up her arms and feeds into the crook of her collar.

She stretches languidly like the jaguar watching you from her perch, her eyes follow your subtle movements and your skin catches fire wherever her gaze lands.

Her chest rises with each deep inhale and in the auric light her body comes alive in the same way la terra unfolds at the first touch of daylight.

The symphonies are loud and the reservations are silenced.

The shadows cover her body in an esoteric cloak of discretion.

The freckles dotted across her sternum light up against their opaque, elevated canvas.

A magnum opus in the reflection.

Bio: 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.

In defense of the undying:

By Yusuf Akman

CW: Mention of Acid Attacks

In defense of the undying, let the undead
unbury their dead without referring to that
old parable of which the gist is more or less
we weren't created for this world but for the hereafter
because it's analytic a posteriori that is self-contradictory
and doesn't appeal to experience. If you don't understand
the *Critique of Pure Reason*, you can always put
a hand-painted glazed ceramic pot with peperomia
graveolens (just make sure it gets filtered sunlight) on it.

I, for one, gave one to Aunt Ruth as a gift on her fifty-fifth birthday
for she said she hated reading books (especially thick, fat, vintage ones
with lots of footnotes) and she put it in front of me as
a coffee table on which she served a strawberry cake in
a Bavarian porcelain plate of which she stole the whole set
from my grandmother's house, just to piss off my mother,
then, she added with a big grin, "Silly me! I always seem to forget
you are allergic to strawberries. I'm sorry."

If you don't really mean it, better never say it, but, yeah,
I was a fucking asshole for telling her daughter,
"Cousin Grace, I'm sorry your face got fucked up in an acid attack."

Though I would be lying if I said I didn't feel relieved
for terrible things also happening to the beautiful and rich.

Seventeen days later she took her own life,
becoming the thing I feared most: a thread

linking us through kindredship and also remorse
which I never asked for. She wanted us to shed bitch tears
after her, but even that wasn't enough; she wanted to die
again and again, become a harvest song, some sort of
resurrection ballad we gather and sing each year:
“Woe to you, woe to us!”

Bio: Yusuf Akman was born in Denizli, Turkey. They are a senior philosophy student at Boğaziçi University whose literary focus revolves around what having a queer identity in Turkey is like. Their works appeared in the online journals Trampset, Raised Brow Press, Resurrection Magazine and Cypress Press.

Twitter: @Akman_Yusuf_

A Restless Night:

By Melissa Ashley Hernandez

It's 12 AM
slightly parted lips, jaw
slack, rhythmic breathing,
scrunched forehead now relaxed,
eyes twitching behind brown-lashed
lids, racing thoughts put to bed.
My fingers trace jawline
down neck
across chest
along waist
and up again—
you always fall asleep first.
I gingerly place my cheek on you,
your heartbeat my lullaby.

It's 2 AM
I wake up with a start,
anxiety's nightly adrenaline
rush. I turn to you, adjusting
to dark, quieting nerves.
To close my eyes would rob
myself of this moment;
your breathing is so beautiful—
the way you shift your body
to pull me closer, the bridge
of my nose a perfect fit
in your neck, the missing piece
of your 25 year old jigsaw puzzle.

It's 4 AM
I stir awake to your hips
slowly pushing
against mine,
lips trail
down neck nape,
down shoulder blade,
down center spine.
Fingers trace imperfections,
all shame melts away
as I tangle my legs into yours,
your arms wrap around my body.
My hand raises up to your cheek

and you fall back to sleep.
I relish in your warmth.

It's 8 AM
This winter embrace feels
so much like home, we barely
stir to the piercing alarm

*I woke up a few times last night,
you say,
I couldn't help but watch you sleep.
You looked so beautiful—
You pause and kiss my forehead.
I still can't believe that you're mine.*

Bio: Melissa is a Latinx writer and the founding EIC of The Minison Project. She is published/forthcoming in The Minison Zine, The Daily Drunk Magazine, and Versification Magazine. She will have a short story feature in a Cemetery Gates Media collection of quiet horror releasing mid-2021, and her poetry chapbook, *The Love in Between*, is to be published by Lazy Adventurer Publishing in January 2021.

Website and Socials:

<https://linktr.ee/melissaashleyhernandez>

How to Plan for Peace Talks**By Matt Hohner**

Leave the Kalashnikovs at home. Take the kittens.
Take cookies. Men who hate each other across fancy tables will still eat cookies together. Hang Picasso's *Guernica* from the largest wall and require all sides to pledge allegiance to the dying horse, the lightbulb, the screaming woman holding her wounded baby. At moments of impasse release the kittens. Dose the room with cute until they're laughing. When the warring sides begin to name their kittens, give every warlord a scoop and assign litter boxes. Play Bach's Cello Suites over their headsets instead of interpreters' translations of intransigence. Serve water from the last place each nation bombed. Serve it in vessels pulled intact from the rubble. Somewhere in the chaos of their mutual ambition, grandmothers tend garden plots. Serve them fruit and vegetables fertilized with the blood of children. For dessert, resolution served two ways: honey or vinegar. When they fail to choose, send them home with a colony of bees in each briefcase and guides on how to harvest honey. Make them fly coach, to bathe in the gaze and breath of the people they are about to kill.

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Bio: Matt Hohner’s poetry has been shortlisted for the *Moth* International Poetry Prize and won the Maryland Writers Association Poetry Prize, *Oberon* Poetry Prize, *Sport Literate* “Anything but Baseball” Poetry Prize, and Doolin Writers’ Weekend Poetry Prize. His recent publications include *Live Canon Anthology 2019*, *Boyne Berries*, and *Prairie Schooner*. Hohner has collaborated with local artists for an ekphrastic project using an LED billboard in Baltimore, as well as Dutch composer Bec Plexus for an original piece performed in Amsterdam (2018). An editor with *Loch Raven Review*, Hohner’s collection *Thresholds and Other Poems* (Apprentice House) was published in 2018. His next collection will be published by Salmon Poetry in 2022.

Issue 2 Special Language Feature:

By Laura Bested Madsen

Danish version

Kapitalistisk underkastelse
Lige fra livets begyndelse
Det tikkende verden sur
Evighedstræets aldrig mættende kur
Ni til fem
Dagen efter tager vi også hjem
Udeblevne nærvær
Systemet skuffer ikke, heller ikke i uvejr
Svøm mod ilden eller brænd i vandet
Gå ud af en lige vej, ikke vær for kantet
Bryd det mønster du bør følge
Havet kommer altid med en ny bølge
Stop op, sug in
Tiden stopper kun med det rette sind.

Edited Translation

Capitalist submission
From momentary conception, ceaseless,
The ticking world clock,
The forever tree never ending diet,
Nine to five
And after we return to dormant state,
An absent presence,
This system doesn't disappoint, never disturbed by weather.
But swim as we do, against the fire and burning waters blue
Where out we walk on a straight path, jagged and unsentimental,
Where broken bonds are forcefully followed
Like ocean waves that come again,
Pause, suck in
And relinquish time,
A concept that only stops with mindful action.

Bio: Laura B Madsen (@laurabested-twitter) is an emerging poet and writer from Denmark. Laura has lived around the world. This is Laura's first publication.

Farah Hasan
Quiet -Art Feature Issue 2

Commentary: This piece portrays the double standard in gender within Middle Eastern societies. The model has her mouth painted over because of her inability to speak freely and express herself. One eye being covered represents the absence of visualizing her own future and ideas because of cultural and religious confines she is forced and expected to follow. The background is an abstract display of her mentality and that the unruly mess that is perceived is a reflection of her mental state because of the restrictions she has to live with. Alternatively, the chaotic background along with the nonchalant facial expression could also be interpreted as hidden anger and frustration caused by the life she is living.

Bio: Farah Hasan is an emerging Syrian artist who is currently pursuing a BSc in Psychology with Criminology.