

Everscribe

MAGAZINE

ISSUE NO. 5

AETERNUM SCRIPTOR

Embrace the art of the written word in Everscribe's fifth issue, showcasing incredible works from our talented writers.

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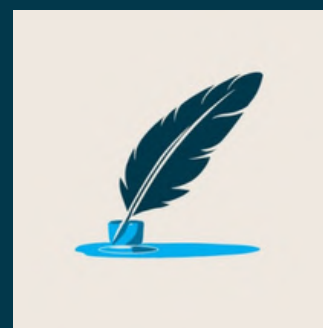
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About Everscribe

Everscribe is a non-profit digital literary magazine dedicated to showcasing exceptional writing and talent. We invite individuals from all backgrounds, experiences, and ages to share their work with us.

Our mission is to create an accessible platform that makes it simple and straightforward for anyone to publish with us. We want to break down barriers and provide opportunities for all writers to showcase their talent and creativity, as we believe that talent should speak for itself. With our monthly issues, Everscribe aims to be a launching pad for those who have longed to share their stories but felt limited by traditional publishing routes. Our submissions are always open, and our process is free, easy, and unlimited!



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Everscribe's Platforms

Join the conversation and fun in Everscribe's welcoming community across various platforms.

Visit our official [Discord](#) server and reach out to us on [X](#), and [Instagram](#)!



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Editor's Note

Dear Scribe,

I'm thrilled to share the fifth issue of Everscribe with you, titled *Aeternum Scriptor*, which means "Forever Writer." This title speaks to the timeless nature of storytelling and the enduring passion that fuels every writer's journey. Whether you're crafting your first draft or polishing your hundredth piece, you're part of a tradition that stretches across generations, and that's something truly special.

This issue is filled with remarkable talent—writers who've poured their hearts into stories that explore love, loss, hope, and everything in between. Every piece is a reminder of why we write: to connect, to feel, and to share the world through our own unique lens.

A heartfelt thank you to our writers for trusting Everscribe with your words. Your creativity and dedication are the heart of this magazine. I'm also deeply grateful to our Managing Editor for their tireless work and to all of you in our community for making this such a welcoming space for writers to thrive.

I hope you enjoy this issue and find inspiration in the works within. Thank you for being part of this journey, your support means everything.

With warm gratitude,

A handwritten signature in a cursive script that reads "Dafia".

Founder & Editor-in-Chief

Scribe's Corner



Word of the Month!

The Scribes have spoken... The word of the month is: **Dreary!**

This month, our Scribes are resonating with the word “Dreary.” Those gray, overcast moments that linger in the background of life. It’s a time to reflect on the quiet, sometimes heavy, emotions that come with uncertainty or monotony. But even in the dreariest of days, there’s a strange kind of beauty to be found, a chance to pause and find meaning in the stillness. Want to help choose our next Word of the Month? Vote in our polls on Discord and social media!

Literary Technique Spotlight

Sometimes, a single symbol can carry the weight of an entire story.

This month, our spotlight shines on **symbolism**—the art of using objects, images, or actions to represent something deeper. Symbolism can transform the ordinary into the extraordinary, adding layers of meaning that linger long after the last page is turned.

In *The Raven* by Edgar Allan Poe, the raven itself becomes a powerful symbol of grief and loss. The bird’s haunting (and *dreary*) repetition of “Nevermore” embodies the narrator’s despair, as he mourns his lost love, Lenore:
“*And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting / On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;*”

Question for our Scribes...

What symbols linger in your writing or your life? Are there recurring images, objects, or moments that carry deeper meaning for you? How do they shape the stories you tell?

Send us your answers in our official Discord community, or post them on X and Instagram using **#ScribesCorner**.

Interview with

Zary Fekete

Three-time Featured author and published in [Issue No. 2, Vox Novum](#), [Issue No. 3, Pulsus Litterae](#), [Issue No. 4, Musa et Verbum](#), and [Issue No. 5, Aeternum Scriptor](#).

Hello! My name is **Zary Fekete**. I grew up in the country of Hungary where I lived until the age of 16. I finished high school and university in the United States and then spent the next 20 years of my life teaching high school students in Eastern Europe and in East Asia. I currently live in Minnesota where I work for a non-profit film production company. I love to read, write, and listen to podcasts while taking long jogs.



What inspired you to write the piece(s) that was published in Everscribe? Can you share the story behind it?

I have had three pieces published in Everscribe (as of this interview) and another piece is on its way. The three that have been published two are creative nonfiction pieces ("Budapest Bus by Night" and "The Secret Cave"), and the third is a short fiction piece that takes many elements from my personal life ("Sunshine"). Most of what I write tends to come from real-life experiences in some manner. For example, in my piece coming out next in Everscribe ("The Hercules Fountain") I have taken some elements from Hungarian mythology and history to imagine a moment. Even when I write something more in the world of fantasy or science fiction, the core issue involved usually comes from something I've been thinking about in my daily life.

What themes or messages do you hope readers take away from your work?

I like to slow down and observe things passing me by in daily life.

Writing helps me do this. I like challenging my own thoughts about the world. If I have a knee-jerk reaction to something in the news, I try to stop myself and ask whether I'm right or if I need to be more generous in my perspective. I wish I wasn't so needy and dependent... hoping people will like what I produce.

How has your writing evolved since you started? Are there any particular influences that have shaped your style?

I have only been writing for about four years. I still feel very new at this. Since writing has taken off as a hobby, I have definitely read a lot more, and I'm sure my writing has come to mirror some of the authors I admire. I really like some of the English language short story writing from the early to middle of the 20th century. Some of my favorites writers are Patricia Highsmith, Daphne Du Maurier, and Shirley Hazzard.

If you could give one piece of advice to aspiring authors, what would it be?

I feel like everybody says this... but

it's true: the best thing to do is to read a lot and write a lot. All of what you read will help you. Much of what you write will not be good... some good pieces will start to surface over time. And even the bad things you write will be helpful if you reread them actively and edit them repeatedly.

Are there any upcoming projects or works in progress that you're particularly excited about?

Well, I am certainly excited about my piece coming out in the fifth issue of Everscribe :) I also have pieces in early 2025 coming out in places like Abyss and Apex, Remington Review, Darkwinter Lit... and a few others. I have a forthcoming book of some of my short stories coming out later in the year from Creative Texts Publishing.

How can readers find you and see more of your work?

I am on X and Instagram @ZaryFekete and on Bluesky @zaryfekete.bsky.social I post about everything I publish... like most authors, I suppose. :)

Everscribe is thrilled to have published talented writers like Zary Fekete! We thank you for choosing Everscribe as your literary home. Read Zary Fekete's "**The Hercules Fountain**" in this issue, [page 12!](#)

Interview with

Simon Collinson

Published in *Issue No. 2, Vox Novum*, *Issue No. 3, Pulsus Litterae*, *Issue No. 4, Musa et Verbum*, and *Issue No. 5, Aeternum Scriptor*.

My name is **Simon Collinson** and I'm from England. I like writing stories, especially ones that are Gothic. Sometimes I write poetry. I started writing late in life. After successfully being treated for cancer I decided to start writing those stories that were always in my head.

What inspired you to write the piece(s) that was published in Everscribe? Can you share the story behind it?

For "Dolly Bridge," the writing group I'm in had a prompt, a photograph of a bridge, and in my mind I wanted to write about a bridge that was built from straw. Whereas "Danger Dad" was based on a true story. On Bonfire Night I was sent outside to supervise the kids and make sure they didn't get injured. But it ended up with me getting burnt and the kids bringing me in for treatment! I am very accident-prone and am always falling off things or breaking items. "Hello Mr Magpie," I wrote as I saw a lot of magpies around and it made me think of the rhyme. "A Night In The Basement" is based on a real reading event I attended for Halloween.

What themes or messages do you hope readers take away from your work?

I like to look at topics from unusual or strange angles. I would like to put across the message that life is

not always predictable and that much of life is absurd. I often write stories that are surreal or look at life in a different way.

How has your writing evolved since you started? Are there any particular influences that have shaped your style?

I used to get lots of ideas and start stories, but never finish them. I am now much better at finishing a story. I enjoy reading Dante, Poe, and Lovecraft. It was after reading the latter that I realized it was possible to write the strange stories that are always in my thoughts. I try to write stories the way I like. If I wrote like somebody else then it wouldn't be my story.

If you could give one piece of advice to aspiring authors, what would it be?

I would say that getting into the habit of writing every day is helpful. I keep a notebook where I record as much as possible the ideas that hit me, and anything I see or hear that is unusual. It might not be useful today, but on another day it could be used. I listened to another writer

talk about their ideas. I told them to get them down on paper. It might look bad but you can always improve it later on. The key thing is to start writing and keep writing.

Are there any upcoming projects or works in progress that you're particularly excited about?

I have lots of ideas, usually strange ones. So usually I am working on several stories at once. So at this moment in time, I'm working on stories about a scary Victorian painting, Osiris, a nasty warden, a resurrection with a difference, one about the seasons visiting, a story about a person who has a frightening meeting set up that they dare not miss and a story about a family who has unusual gifts.

How can readers find you and see more of your work?

I have an account on X @simon_coll87859. I have a story due to be published in Dark Winter Lit Mag, "Epsom Road" in January and a story in "The Selkie" called "Spin the bottle" due out in March

Everscribe is thrilled to have published talented writers like Simon Collinson! We thank you for choosing Everscribe as your literary home. Read Simon Collinson's "**A Night In The Basement**" in this issue, [page 16!](#)

Fictional Short Story

Renee Chen

The Anatomy of a Firework

Lo has it that your great-grandfather was a firework master. All his life, he toiled in a miniscule factory separated from the nearest city by a mountain-clefting gorge. By the time the light of dawn had floated down to the factory's tinplate gables, he had arrived at its muddy roadside, ready to mill powder and collect it into round pellets called stars, heaving them onto a spinning metal barrel that spread the powder evenly across the stars' fringes. Before the stars could be splayed out to dry on brass trays under the sun, his hands were already fog-gray with powder, the calluses sodden with ash.

Every once in a while, when my mother retold the story of his sky-labors, I'd picture a middle-aged man in a soot-stained rampart, stooped before a churning barrel. I would think about the contractors of your own time, steering into his mountains, the polyethylene pipes puncturing into his muddy gutters and ravines, and wonder whether

“Fireworks—the most evanescent art there is.”

his factory—its moss-frosted smokestacks and latticed walls—was as short-lived as the

kaleidoscope of fireworks its workers built. Or it has somehow managed to persist, and that if we stumbled upon the village now, we could still walk its cheese-holed lanes.

A week ago, a doctor holding a cyclone of yellow binders diagnosed me with Alzheimer's, though I was shipshape on the linoleum, tie ironed, hair tar-black, my fifties lurking. Permanent memory loss, she pronounced.

Days later, I am writing this to you, to salvage the last petering lore, folktale, and epics scattered across my hippocampus, the billion atoms of light left of a waning firework, hoping that like your great-grandfather, I can at least be a conduit for something greater, something extraordinary.

In the Han Dynasty, before the existence of fireworks, families knitted bamboo stems into symmetrical strands, cocoons of hollow air pockets that exploded when flung into fire. People called them *bianpao*, firecrackers loud enough to puncture cumulus-stained skies, pass a thousand gables to the ears of the *nian* beast as it haunts scores of children, roams rice paddies for food.

When the turn of centuries reached the Song Dynasty, alchemists poured charcoal into

paper tubes, sprinkling fistfuls of sulfur and saltpeter in. At first, they were aiming to create elixirs of immortality, but ended up with fireworks—the most evanescent art there is.

Chinese flowers, visiting Arab merchants called them.

Before she withered, crumbling onto herself like the kaolin tea that fell from your palm in your ninth summer, my mother kept a retail store that brimmed with romanticism. Its four shelves, camped in jars of jelly sticks and marble chocolates, loomed over the terrazzo floor, descending in height from left to right like Russian dolls.

She had an eye for colors, she liked to say. Could distinguish russet from sepia chocolate bars, the intensity of light in a monochrome photograph. She had a dream where she would turn the world around her into a coloring book and fill her favorite shades in. There would be matcha tea in seafoam green, light strewn with dust motes rolling in across the counter, and her beige, calloused hands—all in picture-perfect gradient.

A decade later, I walked her contrail and kept the store open. Its facsimile machine and dust-decked shelves witnessed your maelstrom of firsts, infant tongue and threadbare school bag. In the

afternoons, while I sat at the counter, folding cranes and balloons out of week-old newspapers, you riffled through manga trilogies, and stenciled masked villains and caped heroes onto the peeling walls.

Then two years ago, against the cubic freezer where you, in crinkled overalls, once hoarded brass buttons and bottle lids under a cavalcade of soda popsicles, you set up an IBM NetVista for me and pointed at my fax machine, asking what it was.

In 1915, twenty years past the Treaty of Shimonoseki, former prisoner Yu Qingfang led a revolt against Japanese rule in Taiwan. Qingfang declared himself the heaven-mandated emperor, designated to rally the righteous and drive out the Japanese. Japanese police stations were stormed by Aboriginal and Han Chinese fighters. Your great-granduncle joined the effort.

“Zhizhàng,” your great-grandfather called him. Moron. They were frog-legged on the tatami mattress in the living room, a cacophony of cicadas shrouding the evening.

“What else should we do? Let the Japanese rule us forever?” Your grand-granduncle asked. He was three years younger than his brother, bird-boned; when he spoke, anthems paraded through his skull, a thousand chants for freedom stirring his pulse to life.

“Taiwan will be freed eventually,” your great-grandfather answered. He primed the cigar above his lighter, spinning it until the end was evenly burnt, a uniform glow rousing. “Why hurry?” He asked.

Your great-granduncle smoothed his hands against the khaki linen of his trousers, back and forth, again and again. “When people only believe in the eventualities,” he said, “we’ll never be free.”

Five days into the demonstration in Tainan, thirty thousand protestors were executed. When your great-granduncle didn’t return home that night, your great-grandfather slept on the bamboo corridor, watching as moonlight

*“Do you remember
your childhood
dream?”*

ticked down the spigot, a papier mâché of gravel and rain forming beside his chin. A week later, he primed a fire in the yard and flung all photos of his brother into the scarlet reef, the folio of black-and-white vestiges, a boy with a buzz cut in a sleeveless white pulverizing, the scullery behind him pots-vined.

“Bèn dàn,” your great-grandfather said. “He deserved this.”

Two weeks after my diagnosis, I plucked the front door key for the retail store from my bedside drawer and walked over to Bo Yuán’s house. He was clad in a white tank top, his man bun dark against the cloud-marbled sky.

“Help me clean up?” I asked him.

That afternoon, we interred tiers of mold-stained manga books and calendars, and lacquered the ground in our Wellington boots. He asked me about you, where you are now, and whether you’re still studying history. I told him about

your apartment in New Haven but avoided mentioning your boyfriend.

“I always thought that Xiǎo Xuán was too good for me,” he said nonetheless.

When the sun had set, I handed him the key, along with a vestige of my memories. He studied the hasp as he locked it, the rust snowballing across the black iron. “Remember when you taught us how to fix our bike chains here?” He asked me, pointing at the vending machine ahead of us.

I thought about him a decade ago, shirtless, crouched before a cornerstone in the store, welding frayed electrical leads with his pudgy fingers. Do you remember your childhood dream? I wanted to ask him. To be a white-robed scientist, an inventor, working in antiseptic-strewn labs?

But when I opened my mouth, all I managed was an inhalation. “You were really impressed when I cut that chainline,” I told him. He laughed.

Mentioning the February 28 massacre remained a taboo until the 1990s.

Following the surrender of Japan in World War II, the administration of Taiwan was passed to the Chinese government. The people soon grew resentful of the corruption and misconduct of the Kuomintang party, its seizures of private properties and economic mismanagement.

On February 27, 1947, a police officer fired into a group of angry bystanders in Taipei after he struck a woman suspected of selling contraband cigarettes. Demonstrators stormed a radio station and broadcast news of the

protest across the country. Uprisings were suppressed by the National Revolutionary Army, killing more than eighteen thousand civilians. Taiwan was placed under martial law and descended into the White Terror.

For forty years, the government enforced mass surveillance of people through the Taiwan Garrison Command—the secret police.

After I graduated from high school, I became a writer for the Tainan county newspaper, choosing my words with caution on the office's checkerboard floor, knees cramped within its jelly-green walls. With a pocketful of train fare, I traversed the Alishan Mountain of Chiayi, where the Tsou people resided before their ancestors migrated into the band of land between the Chianan Plain and Yushan. I hitchhiked to Fort Santo Domingo in Tamsui, the small Spanish colony once plagued by disease and local hostilities.

In the port city of Keelung, I quit my job back in Tainan and became a freelance reporter, to stir buried stories to life, the paperworks of memories waiting to be salvaged. For a while, I couldn't help wondering whether, like your great-granduncle, an obstinate chant for freedom also veined my body, and whether I too was a revolutionary.

Before his brother's funeral, your great-grandfather was approached by a girl with black-samite hair, slim in a teal kimono with zigzags stenciled onto the crude cotton. He had seen the same girl with your great-granduncle at the thoroughfare, hand-in-hand a week

ago.

She placed a photograph into his palm. From it, his brother stared back at him, a boy with a cumulus of tousled hair, his face still doughy with baby fat. On his brother's back was the same girl, her black irises like tidbits of caviar.

As she walked away, your great-grandfather slipped the photo into his breast pocket and tried to picture his brother in his khaki shirt, fists balled on the dais before Xilai Temple, him and three thousand protestors. He wondered whether the picture of his brother and a girl whose name he never knew could fill this lacuna.

You never told me when you fell in love with history, the whitecaps of chariots and thrones inching past ebbs, the flow of time, but I like to think that you fell for it on the winter evenings, when the sky glimmered milk-white and we were cozied up on your bed; when I plucked stories from my mind, tales that came from as far away as Mongolia, tragedies dating back to the Xia dynasty.

For nights, I would splay my hands out in the middle of stories, humming what I claimed to be the work songs of Qin laborers crenelating the Great Wall. You would float in my pool of tales, tracing my skeleton fingers as they glided across rubbles of newspapers and cotton quilts, begging me for another story when I called it late night. Any story, you would say—phantoms, monsters, the rabbit on the moon, two peacocks flying southeast.

My mother and I took you and Bo Yuán to your first fireworks years

ago, your eyes puffy from the late evening. We wheeled down crowded streets, the night hot with the drizzling of oil on *teppan*, clanks of spatulas in the air. By the time we had retreated to the outskirts of the night market and found ourselves standing among the weeds in your schoolyard, all of us were sweating.

I took my shoes off and climbed up the monkey bars, and you followed behind me, our bare soles against the tarnish. When we reached the top, we looked out onto the aging city, the slumbering earthquake-eroded apartments. Suddenly, the first shots of fireworks rang out.

“The rabbit on the moon, two peacocks flying southeast.”

A thousand colors flared into the night; a single line of light spiraled into a pinecone of brightening sequins. I stared at the sky, your breath purring against my arm. “Are those fireworks?” You asked.

I nodded.

A white fireball leapt into the air, exploding into shreds of glass. Nine pink beams disintegrated, and shoals of angelfish swam out six leagues above our heads, the light a millimeter from our touch. Your jacket rustled against my eggshell skin. I sat down on the ledge of the monkey bars.

“Who invented fireworks?” You asked me.

I spread out my arms, conjuring a tale from the uncharted marshes in my memories. “Would you believe me,” I asked, “if I tell you

that fireworks are older than paper?”

“They are?”

“They are.”

Above us, the saltpeter islands of stars faded into mist.

Somewhere, the grotto of a tin-roofed factory remained, and a man was dusting flecks of gunpowder off a carton-lined windowsill. In their ash coats, his hands scrabbled the

sash, the scouring pad gliding down like rain. Before the land was wrapped in tin and the sugar cane mills were built, a Siraya woman danced with others in a circle, arms-linked, singing about an ancestral famine that had lasted for seven years.

Climbing down the creaking monkey bar, I told you about the

printer Gong Xuanyi and his jade block, Song dynasty woodblocks, and rows of scholars inside a one-window cell, hands galloping across geometric waves of words. In a fallen citadel, monks recited lines from a mildew-choked scripture in a monotone. Somewhere, a moth-eaten manuscript came alive on the milk-warm skin of an arbalist.

Renee Chen is an Asian-American writer currently residing in Taipei, Taiwan. She has written short stories for *trampset*, *JMWW*, and *Cosmic Double*, the latter of which nominated her for Best Small Fictions. Her short story collection, *The Un-Inquired*, is published by *Querencia Press*.

Sarah Das Gupta

The Jewel of the Goddess

A ghostly mist crept over the *bustee*, its long fingers stretching halfway up the straggly palm trees leaning over a huddle of huts. Their trunks hidden, the palm tops seemed to be floating, unanchored. Despite the early hour and the chill of the October morning, figures could be seen moving through the narrow paths between the shacks, as if behind a thin grey curtain. Women in brightly coloured saris, earthen pots of water expertly balanced on their heads, suddenly disappeared through shadowy doorways. Already men and women hurried off to work as servants in large houses, which in Kolkata are often surprisingly close to sprawling slums.

Suddenly, a child's crying broke the silence. It came from a hut at the end of one of a maze of muddy alleys criss-crossing the slum.

Inside the hut was cramped but very tidy. A few metal cooking pots hung from hooks on the flimsy walls; on insecure wooden shelves jars of yellow turmeric, dried red peppers, knobbly roots of ginger, tins of oil and ghee emerged from the gloom. A string bed at the back of the single room was separated from the rest of the space by a saffron coloured curtain hung from a thin wire. It was from a wicker cradle, on this string bed, that the unbearable sobbing had come.

Swaddled in blankets, like a tiny, embalmed mummy, a baby was continuously crying. A young girl, hardly a woman, her green sari draped over her head, sat unmoving, frozen into statue-like stillness. In the doorway, a young man stood almost as traumatised.

"If I get work today," Ram spoke wearily, "we can try the new medicine."

His wife lifted her head for a moment. When Ram looked back, he saw a slow tear running down her cheek.

The tram back to Ballygunge that evening was crowded as always. Children in school uniform, women with bunches of dark green spinach and plastic bags of koi fish, swimming despondently in murky water, pushed their way into the tram cars.

Suddenly, the tram screeched to a halt as a cow and her calf strolled leisurely over the tram lines. Ram, who had been dozing in a corner, woke with a sudden start. The smell of fish in the tram and the scent of incense, which had drifted in from a roadside temple, reminded him. In a few days, Kolkata would be transformed by Durga Puja into a city fit for the gods, a magic city of lights, *pandals*, new clothes, joy, faith, and hope. He clutched the paper package in his hand as if were worth at least a *lakh* of rupees!

So far, the day had been lucky for

Ram. He had arrived early at the large construction site in Alipore, an affluent part of the city. Already a queue of casual labourers was waiting in hope that the site manager would recruit some men

"It was truly a palace fit for a Maharajah."

to work on the construction of a block of luxury flats. Only fifty had been chosen; Ram was number forty-nine and he felt he had won the lottery - a chance to carry blocks of stone up ladders, move heavy scaffolding, for a pittance. It was hard, soulless labour but at least he had bought the vital medicine.

As he walked home that night, Ram thought about the approaching Durga Puja, the greatest Hindu festival in Bengal, and a chance once a year to buy new clothes. He decided to stop for a moment at the local *pandal* and see the brilliantly lit pavilion with its images of gods.

The deities were regally housed in a magnificent, royal pavilion, its sides draped with shiny blue silk which gleamed under the neon lighting. It was truly a palace fit for a Maharajah. Jewels in the gods' gold crowns shone brilliantly in the

reflected light. Here was a magic island in a sea of grey, urban anonymity. His gaze centred on the Goddess Durga in all her beauty and power. Her ten hands held the divine weapons of the gods.

He thought of the tales of his childhood. Back in the village, his grandmother had held the children spellbound with stories of the gods. Far into the night they had listened in the flickering lamplight, learning how Durga, the ultimate female

“There was an overwhelming stillness about her.”

warrior, returns every year from Mount Kailash, her heavenly home, to visit her parents. Riding her *Bahan*, the majestic lion, she slays the fearful demon king, Mahishasura.

Ram looked into the face of Durga, the Goddess who was said to have one hundred and eight names. Her eyes were at first glance fierce as she thrust her spear into the hideous demon. Yet, as he looked closely, Ram felt a powerful, sense of compassion.

Ram looked at Durga's four children, dutifully poised beside their warrior mother. Her daughters, Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, splendid in brilliant pink, her wise owl perched beside her; Saraswati, goddess of knowledge and music, in a saffron sari, accompanied by an elegant swan. On the far left was the portly figure of her son, Lord Ganesh, bringer of good beginnings – a tiny mouse at his feet. The family was complete with the handsome figure of Kartik,

god of war, and an equally handsome peacock. Her children stood ready to fight beside their mother against evil.

Ram turned back to the central, arresting figure of Durga. Her brilliant, red silk sari was embroidered with fine gold thread which gleamed in the light. Her eyes, strangely enigmatic, concentrated on the death blow she was about to deliver, her spear hovering over the cringing demon. It was difficult to explain that despite her warlike energy, there was an overwhelming stillness about her. He looked at her golden crown, encrusted with jewels. At the centre was an enormous ruby like a glowing ember or the final sight of the sinking sun. He prayed silently, his eyes on the gleaming stone, his thoughts on his sick child.

Approaching the *bustee*, Ram could hear the usual chatter of voices and smell the smoke from clay ovens as evening meals were being cooked. There was no electricity in the *bustee*. Ram had often seen students, sitting beneath street lights, completing homework! Looking through his own doorway, he saw Rupa and the baby, in a circle of yellow light which faded into darkness in the corners of the small room. They were framed as if in a painting, sleeping mother and child. Her sari had slipped from her head, leaving thick black hair to fall around her shoulders and over her face. Yet, even asleep, she looked pale and drawn. In the wicker cradle Krishna slept, although signs of recent tears still lingered on his face.

Ram walked softly, barefooted to the edge of the string bed. Gently he touched Rupa's hair. She woke

suddenly, guiltily reaching towards the sleeping child, yet afraid to wake him. “At least I got the medicine the doctor at the clinic prescribed.” Ram pulled the precious bottle from the by-now-crumpled bag. “We should wake him and give him a dose as soon as possible.”

Ram managed to prise open the small but determinedly closed mouth. It was as tricky as trying to open a clam. At last, Krishna swallowed most of the dose. He almost immediately fell asleep, a tiny trickle of brown liquid running from the corner of his lips. He seemed calmer but the high fever remained. His forehead felt hot, even to Ram's calloused hand. Later that night, as they settled down to sleep on the narrow bed, Ram tried to remember exactly what time it had been when he had been standing transfixed, gazing at Durga's ruby. It must have been just before he got home with the medicine.

The evening had come for the Goddess to return to her home and her husband, Lord Shiva, on Mount Kailash. It was after the final five days of the celebration, when the thousands of *pandals* had been visited by most of the citizens of Kolkata, in brand new outfits.

Prayers had been said, incense burned, drums beaten, past pujas fondly recalled. That evening the Goddess would leave but the inevitable sadness would be tinged by the faith that Maa Durga would return next Autumn.

Ram was standing by the side of an open-backed lorry, its engine turning over. With a group of the strongest young men of the district, he prepared to shoulder the heavy

contents of the *pandal* onto the waiting lorry. As they edged forward, the images swayed crazily, almost as if they were dancing. Finally, mothers, children, and respective animals were securely loaded. The back of the lorry was packed with local men, boys, and the traditional *Dhaki* drummers.

Other lorries appeared and soon the roads leading to the Hooghly were full of swaying images. Thousands of Durgas, from every part of the city, were on the move, drawn by the magnetic power of the river!

Then all these images would be immersed in the Hooghly- a distributary of the mighty Ganga. In the water, the clay bodies would disintegrate and become part of the river and finally, part of the sea. Eventually, Durga would return home in the form of evaporated rainwater, falling on the high mountains. She waited there to return next Autumn, a perfect symbol of the timeless cycle of death and rebirth.

Ram and the other men succeeded in lifting their Durga from the lorry. By now it was dark and the Hooghly was flowing swiftly.

As they walked into the river, Ram felt the cold rush of the current tugging him forward. At a signal from the bank, the gods were released in their clay forms to begin their long journey home. Ram waded deeper into the fast-flowing waters.

Looking down, he could see Maa Durga, her golden crown still intact, its ruby glowing dimly through the water. Only two of her many arms were still above the surface; whether pleading or blessing, Ram was unsure. He reached down to touch the stone. Even as he whispered a prayer, Durga was

“A last human gesture before she became pure spirit.”

dissolving, leaving her clay body, the bright sari, the brass bangles. Travelling seaward, she would again become pure spirit, back in her mountain home, ready to resume the great battle next year. Struggling to walk back against the pull of the current, Ram heard one of the men calling out the time. It

was just eight o'clock. The tide was about to turn.

The by-then empty lorry dropped Ram outside the *bustee* which was still noisy and excited. Ram walked nervously to the hut at the far end of the slum. He stood in the darkness, peering in through the doorway. Rupa was laughing for the first time that week! In front of her lay Krishna, resplendent in his new outfit, waving his arms and legs madly, giggling helplessly, as his mother tickled him. Ram was spellbound.

In the lamplight, the mother and baby seemed ethereal, caught in the moment, unaware of being watched.

“What happened?” Ram whispered, holding Krishna gently in his arms. He thought of the Goddess, looking up through the water, the gleaming jewel in her crown. He knew now her arms had been raised in a final blessing, a last human gesture before she became pure spirit.

“The fever suddenly broke.” Rupa sounded almost frightened, in case she tempted fate. “It must have been eight o'clock. I heard the hour striking in the house over the road.”

Sarah Das Gupta is a writer from Cambridge, UK who taught English in Kolkata, Tanzania, and the UK. Her work has been published in over twenty countries from Australia to Kazakhstan in literary journals and in anthologies. She is currently nominated for Best of the Net and a Dwarf Star.

Zary Fekete

The Hercules Fountain

A frail beggar stood in the center of the square, one hand outstretched, bobbing up and down.

“Anything? Anything, please?” He repeated the words endlessly throughout the day in a smattering of different languages, English, German, French, but mostly Hungarian. His perch was the legendary Hercules Fountain in the center of the King Mathias Palace ruins of Visegrad, just north of Budapest on the famous Danube bend. Tourists flocked to the area to see the millennium-old walls. Occasionally elementary school tours came through with the teachers speaking in confident voices about the 1000 years of defeat ushered in by the Mongolian invasion in the 13th century, an event that destroyed the palace and much of the country besides. It was a national tragedy spoken of in hushed reverence by the Hungarian people; an event destined to repeat every few decades, as indeed it had with other foreign conquests of the country in the form of the Habsburgs in the 19th century through the Nazi and Communist armies of the 20th.

Tourists came and went. Some ignored the man. Some dropped coins at his feet. A rare, kind soul actually placed money or bread in his palm. His words went on throughout each day, “Anything?

Thank you! Please?” At the end of each day, he curled out at the base of the fountain with his thin pad and fell asleep.

The sun rose again the next day, as it always had. The man stood and fixed his gaze on the soon-to-be-opened front gates. He assumed his stance, hand out, furtive smile in place. The first guests to enter was a small family of four. They paid him no mind. Then came a few college-aged students, swilling beer, awake all night from the party next door in the hotel. The thin man prepared himself for another long day.

But then, another man entered. His clothes were different, as though from another era. His hair was thick and built up around his bright eyes in a kind of royal

“Many have forgotten. It is right behind you.”

fashion. But his eyes were most significant of all, sharp and striking and impossible to forget. He came through the gates and looking directly at the beggar, walked forward with his eyes fixed on the hopeful hand.

“Do you know who you are, sir?” the noble guest asked.

“No one, I think,” the beggar said.

“That is, no one to concern someone as yourself.” His words were high-pitched and reedy, but they contained hints of lofty poetry as anyone who has heard and understood Hungarian knows. The beggar took the moment as a hopeful chance. He held up his hand. “Anything perhaps, sir?”

The guest said nothing for a moment. Then he reached into his pocket and took out a bill. The beggar’s eyes widened. It was a 1000 forint piece. The beggar held his breath, absolutely uncertain what this could mean. Then, after a silent moment passed, the guest pulled out, rhythmically, nine more bills until he had an even stack of ten. It was more money than the beggar had ever seen.

The guest held out the stack. Then he asked, “Do you know what picture this is?” His finger pointed at an ornate engraving on the one side of the paper money.

“I... I do not, sir,” the beggar said.

The guest nodded. “Many have forgotten. It is right behind you.” With that he lifted the stack, indicating the stone fountain. “And haven’t you heard the tales?”

The beggar shook his head.

The man nodded with a small smile. “1000 years are over. The tragedy has ended.”

The beggar stood, hardly daring to breathe. And the man placed the bills in his outstretched hand.

Zary Fekete grew up in Hungary. He has a debut novella (Words on the Page) out with *DarkWinter Lit Press* and a short story collection (To Accept the Things I Cannot Change: Writing My Way Out of Addiction) out with *Creative Texts*. He enjoys books, podcasts, and many many many films. Twitter and Instagram: @ZaryFekete Bluesky:zaryfekete.bsky.social

Adédoyin Àjàyí

God Has Beautiful Eyes

Yesterday, that woman died. I heard my mother talking about it. It was also what she said today. The angry youths are burning tyres. The smoke fills my house. The smoke is much. It rises and rises. It curls in the air. I sit in the kitchen and watch them in the street. My big brother sits beside me. He tells me they are protesting. He is always coughing. Sometimes he spits blood when he thinks I cannot see him. His eyes look like they will fall into his head and his skin feels like paper. He tells me not to worry about him. I do not know the meaning of protesting, so he tells me. The youths are chanting. They raise sticks and shout words I can't understand. Their feet are dirty. I can recognise some of the boys who usually stay under the tree among them. I hear Tola crying. I turn away from the kitchen window. He tugs at my skirt. He's hungry. But you can't tell it from his big belly. The kitchen is empty. We ate the last of yesterday's rice this morning. Tola couldn't eat it because it had too much stones. His cries are louder now. The snot draws a line from his nose to his mouth. I carry him and cuddle him to myself. His cries reduce to sniffles. I smile at him. He smiles back. I don't go to school today. But I've learnt something new today. P-r-o-t-e-s-t-i-n-g.

In the evenings, I like to look at the sky. It seems so far away and so close at the same time. There are many tiny things that shine like the chains on the necks of the boys under the tree. They are very many, like the bedbug bites that are on Tola's body. My big brother told me they are stars. The stars are plenty in the sky. They look like eyes looking down on us. When I told my big brother, he smiled and said maybe they were God's eyes. Maybe when people die, they become one of God's eyes. It made me happy. God has many beautiful eyes. That's how he can see everything that happens all the time. I know he can see the days Tola cries because he is hungry. I know he sees the smoke that fills our house from the firewood on the days we can cook. I talk to the stars. I talk to God's beautiful eyes. They always shine like the chains on the neck of the boys under the tree. Every night, they are always plenty, like the lizards that crawl up and down the walls of my classroom.

My street is quiet today. I don't see God's eyes. I am sad. The sky is a blank stretch of black, like someone took my mother's wrapper and threw it over the sky. Maybe God's eyes are sad. I tell them to be happy. They didn't like what happened today. The police came to

chase the youths away. They beat the youths. There was a lot of blood. Some of them ran away and hid in the mechanic's workshop. They like staying there. They talk and laugh. They huddle together as if sharing a secret. They pass cigarettes among themselves. The mechanic once tried to send them away. They beat him with his spanners. Two days later, they brought some drinks in green bottles to his shop. The mechanic

“That's how he can see everything that happens all the time.”

was laughing with them a few minutes after. My big brother sometimes stays with them. They don't trouble me because of him. They sometimes give Tola and I money to buy coke and biscuits. I like the boys. They always have money. When they talk and laugh, the chains on their neck jangle. The rings on their fingers shine in the sun. My brother never tells me how they have so much. Everybody listens to them. When my father beat my mother, my brother told them, and they just told her not to worry. That was the last time my father beat her.

At school, the teachers all whisper about the woman who died. I heard that she died on the staircase. They do not say why she died on the staircase. I don't know why she died on the staircase too. Maybe the baby was in a hurry to come out. I do not know where babies come from. I asked my brother, but he just said I was too young to understand. When I asked Yewande, my friend from school, she just looked at me and she didn't say anything. She has seven brothers and two sisters. Her mummy knows how to make babies. When one of her sisters died last year in the hospital, they said her father gave her the baby. I do not understand.

I always tell God's eyes everything that happens. They do not reply, but I feel better. I told them of the heavy rain last week. The roof of my school came off in the rain. When I saw it this week, it was like looking at my father without his cap. It reminded me of my father when he stands in front of his broken mirror, turning from side to side before he puts his police cap on his head. Once when he was in front of his mirror, I told him about my school fees. He pushed me against the wall and held the broken piece of the mirror in front of my eyes. His eyes were red like my poster colour in Fine Arts class and his mouth smelt of the *kai kai* he always brought home from Iya Chinedu's shop. He told me he was serving his country and if I disturbed him again, he would make marks on my cheeks with the mirror's edges.

My big brother coughs more and more. He cannot hide it anymore. My father doesn't know. He spends his evening with his fellow men in black at Iya Chinedu's shop. The neighbours tell us we need to take my big brother to a big hospital far away. But we don't have any money. The boys under the tree give my mother money sometimes. One day after she cooked for us, she told Tola and I to go out to play. When I came back inside, she was angry. She slapped me and sent me outside. One of the boys under the tree was behind her. His belt had a

“ From here I can see the stars. Tears are in my eyes. ”

big buckle. I liked it. I had never seen one like that before. He was trying to buckle it.

The money the boys give us can only buy food for the next day. I tell God's eyes. They sit silently, shining. They say nothing. They look down at me, all of them. It makes me feel like they heard me. If my brother dies, I'll see him in the sky. I don't know if this makes me happy. I like God's eyes. But I like my brother more. I heard him talking with my mother yesterday. He said he was going to die. My mother cried and told him to stop saying rubbish. I do not want him to die too. My mother says I will have to leave them. She is taking my big

brother and Tola back home to the village. My big brother is getting weaker. My fingers can go round his wrists. The breeze blows his clothes when he wears them. When he breathes, you can hear something shaking in his chest, like some of Tola's old toys. My mother says I have to go and live far away with my Auntie Yemisi. There were tears in her eyes when she told me She packed a small bag for me and hugged me tightly.

This is my last night in my house. I sit at the window with the torn net in the sitting room. From here I can see the stars. Tears are in my eyes. I sit and talk to God's eyes. I tell them everything that comes to my mind. I do not know if I will see them in Auntie Yemisi's house. I tell them how my father beats my mother, and how we have no food to eat. I tell them of the lizards that learn with us from their cracks in the wall of my schools. I tell them of the boys under the tree and how they give us money.

I can see a big star. Maybe that's the pregnant woman. There's a small star near her. That's her baby. I try to picture his eyes. I recall Tola's eyes when he was a baby. They looked like two small, black beads. I'll keep looking for a new star till I see my big brother's eyes. He will see the pregnant woman and her baby. Of the many stars, I hope I will be able to know him. I hope he will recognise me.

I'll keep looking for him. He will be a beautiful star.

One of God's beautiful eyes.

Adédoyin Àjàyí is a young Nigerian writer. He writes from Lagos, the city that never sleeps. Nature is the biggest influence on his writing. His work has appeared in Brittle Paper, Kalahari Review, Afrocritik, Livina Press, Maudlin House, African Writer, Ngiga Review, Spillwords Press, Journal of African Youth Literature, and elsewhere. He was recently longlisted for the 2024 JAY Lit Awards (fiction category). He's addicted to cakes, books, and suits. He tweets @AjayiAdedoyin14.

Patricia Nicole Tan

A Writer's Exile

How are you such a good writer?

Everyone says it: my family, my friends, even strangers who stumble upon my work. They marvel, wide-eyed and awestruck, at the emotions I weave into words. I pour my soul into crafting characters who breathe, bleed, and ache. And here I am now, spinning another tale from a shard of my

“But have I tasted the sweetness of a lover’s embrace?”

own experience, hoping to connect with a fellow dreamer. When I write, it feels as though I’ve cracked

open the universe, conjured a spark, and gave life.

But have I tasted the sweetness of a lover’s embrace? Never. The only love I know is the kind my parents and friends shower me with: warm but safe, a flicker compared to the wildfire I imagine. Yet, I write of passion so vividly you’d swear I’ve burned in its flames. Have I felt the grip of terror, enough to pen a chilling horror? No, my world is too dull, and my fears are too mundane: death, spiders, and the ticking time of my own existence. Even triumph feels hollow. Every victory I claim drowns, telling me it’s not enough, that it was expected, not earned.

I breathed life into words I cannot enter. I sculpt emotions I’ve never

dared to feel. I build universes with trembling hands, longing for the very things I create. Imagine this: a writer who pens love but has only skimmed its surface, who births terror but flinches at a tiny spider. Can you see the cruel irony?

I am a creator, the unseen force behind every word yet never the subject of the story. Perhaps that is why I write; not to live through my characters but to understand the parts of me that are too afraid to step into the light.

Maybe this is my role in this chaotic world.

A good writer? Perhaps.

But the muse? Never.

And maybe that’s the way it’s meant to be.

Simon Collinson

A Night In The Basement

The email said to arrive at the Heggie Library at 4:40, “For a night of uneasy readings.”

I would be there, delivering some of my scary stories in the basement. I was nervously approaching the building in fast-fading light, the clocks having gone back a few nights ago.

“The public hadn’t been allowed down here in many years.”

Halloween was nearly upon us. Darkness, the basement and Halloween - Oh My!

The Heggie Library is a grand old building. Or rather, what remains of it is. For in 2011 the council had sold off most of the buildings and had shorn the Library of most of its grandeur. Now houses and a car park enveloped the place.

There had been excitement and trepidation in the Heggie Library writing group since it was announced there would be a session of readings for a Halloween night at the Library to be provided by the group.

Ken Skinner, the group’s coordinator, said it would be called an “Evening of uneasy readings.” And he added, “I thought it would make a nice touch if it took place in

the basement.”

The basement? I was curious. In all my years of living here, I had never seen the basement. Part of me was excited, yet also anxious.

I’d heard about the basement.

No one had been in the basement in years. It was rumoured that you could hear strange voices down there. Whatever it was you didn’t want to disturb the thing that stirred down there.

I was nervous about this assignment.

Something bad always happens in the basement. In stories, there’s nearly always a body, somewhere down there... It’s just a matter of finding it. Or “it” finding you...

I entered and saw half the library had been plunged into darkness, apart from the flickering lights provided by some tea lights candles. The wan yellowness merged sickly into the dark. I saw Ken talking with Lauren in the shadows, a fellow member of the group. They were dressed in black. Like for a wake.

Ken saw and welcomed me saying he had explained the event to Lauren and she could take me down to the basement and show me around. She was holding a torch.

Lauren opened the creaking gate, at the top of the stairs. The gate had a sign on it, “Librarians only.” We needed special permission to venture into these hidden depths.

The public hadn’t been allowed down here in many years.

What secrets were the librarians hiding I wondered?

As we carefully descended those steps, it was the walls I noticed first. All crumbly and flaky. Then the heat. My face felt warm as we crept down the stairs. Finally, the musty smell that clamoured around my nostrils.

An uneasy place to hold the uneasy readings, I thought.

I was entering another world. An unpleasant and uncomfortable one. It resembled a bunker down there. Dull grey walls. And narrow corridors and small rooms. This part of the building wasn’t designed for human comfort. Humans were intruders down here, it belonged to something else.

Lauren showed me where the fire escape was. “Just in case,” she added nervously. I saw a room with a door open to our right.

“What was it used for?” I asked.

“Storage, and newspaper files, apparently,” replied Lauren.

Lauren showed me the room where Stuart and Katie would be doing their readings. I saw a bare stony floor room that looked very gloomy indeed. And even more dusty than the corridors. I noticed the walls had some strange markings. It was warm down there but I still inwardly shivered. I wondered if the room I was in

would be the same.

We walked past the middle room. The door was open so I could see shelves with rows of big files on them. I wondered what hidden stories these old papers could tell.

This place was full of secrets.

Lauren showed me into the room where she and I would be reading. I was glad it didn't look as dreary and had a carpet. The air was breathable, at least.

But it looked gloomy. The only light was provided by a smattering of tea light candles. And these flickered dimly, throwing capricious shades of light across the room, swaying back and forwards from light and darkness and everything in between. They created sinister silhouettes that led my eyes astray.

The ceiling hung over me like a noose. Oppressive and uncomfortable. I felt cramped and on edge.

Lauren mentioned that Ken would be reading in the garden. I thought he would have the best of it with clear air. But it was forecast for rain. So maybe not.

I placed my bag of books down as we went over some organisational matters. I told Lauren I wouldn't be doing my original choice, "The terrors". I explained I found it too draining to do that one again. Some secrets should not be told too often. We quickly sorted out the seating, timing, and the lights.

I was glad Lauren had a torch. I wouldn't be able to read by candlelight alone.

We went back up the stairs to meet the other writers and the audience. There would be tea and coffee provided too. Everyone was dressed in black, apart from a woman who was dressed all in vivid

white. I hadn't seen her walk in.

It was a sombre affair. Made more unsettling by the creepy sounds of a haunting harpsichord playing its notes, tingling and jangling up and down our spines.

It was a sparse group. Stuart and

*"And she was there,
the woman in purest
white."*

his wife, Alice, were there. I saw Katie dressed as the Mad Hatter. I found myself standing next to the woman wearing a dress of glowing white. She was wearing an Edwardian Tea Dress. A soft dress made of cotton and lace. She looked captivating with a face agleam like snow.

I'd never seen her before. But her twinkling eyes caught my attention. The way they sparkled and were full of life. I didn't catch her name. I said to her I liked writing and she replied she loved singing. I wondered if I would see her again later on. I hoped I would. Maybe this evening would not be so gloomy after all.

But then Ken addressed us all.

"I don't believe in ghosts," he said in a voice that suggested he did believe in ghosts. He mentioned the tales of voices heard in the basement. "They say the voices belong to a ghost called Emily," he told us.

He also shared a story about "Leftie Jen," an old left-handed girlfriend who had left him with a coat on the night she walked out of his life. And he often found notes in the pocket of this coat, left by "Leftie Jen." He showed us the coat and plucked out a note.

It read: "Winter is coming." He quickly added, "I don't believe in ghosts," but even less convincingly this time.

It was time for the writers to go to their rooms and descend those dusty stairs once more into the basement.

The event was certainly intimate for our first reading; we had an audience of one. I told my stories, "There Be Monsters" and "Night People." Lauren told her folk horror tale of events at a fishing village in Wales about mysterious candles and cats.

It was a strange environment down there. All claustrophobic and cramped, there was nowhere to hide. Unease surrounded and smothered us. At times it felt like everything in that room, walls, ceiling, audience, and the flickering fingers of the candlelight folding around were slowly closing in on you.

Then came the turnaround and a new audience was made up of three people. And I told my tales of terror all over again.

We had reached the midpoint of the "Uneasy night." Back up for welcome coffee and even more welcome fresher air. My face was hot down here. And she was there, the woman in purest white with alluring eyes. My spirits lifted at the sight. I tried to talk to her, but Stuart insisted on telling me about something or other. You know how sometimes someone is talking to you, but your mind is somewhere else entirely?

I glanced over to where she stood, but she had vanished. She had that enticing quality of being both elegant and elusive.

Soon it was time to make our way

into the basement.

This time because of the numbers we would listen to Stuart and Katie. We made up an audience of four. I sat next to Lauren. Then the small woman dressed in shimmering white silently entered the room and sat next to me. That made it five now in the audience. We exchange smiles politely. And my spine tingled again.

In that nice way. Like you do as a child watching a dazzling firework.

“We exchange smiles politely. And my spine tingled again.”

This room was dusty and uncomfortably warm. I noticed there was a strange contraption in a glass box. It looked pre-war. I don't know what it was used for.

This was the part of the building that time forgot. Katie told her tale of a nasty knife-wielding grandma with gusto and Stuart his tale of a studio lot that he shouldn't have been on. To add to the unease, part of the wall plaster came off.

Then it was in our room again and a last outing for “There Be Monsters” and “Night People.” My face was burning. I was nervous as I

read my stories out and tried to catch the glance of the woman dressed in the brightest white. She smiled radiantly at me.

And when she did my face burned a bit more.

I was glad the telling of stories had been reduced to three from the original four. Any more tellings of “There Be Monsters” down there and I feared that there really would have been monsters appearing before me.

All the stories were told and it was time to leave. I counted the people leaving the room. Six, I counted six. but there were seven of us in that room and I saw no one leave early.

I asked the other person where the other person was. I was certain that it was the woman dressed in white who was missing. They all looked at me funnily. All of them agreed that there were only six of us down there. Two readers and an audience of four. According to them, there was no woman dressed in white.

But I was sure that I had seen her and spoken to her. “She had told me that she liked singing. You couldn't miss her. She was the only one dressed in white.” I told them.

“Sorry, I think you're wrong there.” Lauren told me. And then Lauren added, “Maybe you were talking to

Emily. You know, that ghost that the librarians sometimes hear in the basement.”

Maybe I had. It certainly was an eerie environment down there. But I had also seen her above the basement.

Just before I left the basement room for the corridor, I felt something lightly brush the back of my shoulder which sent a pleasant shiver down my spine. I looked around, but there was nothing there.

We went back up, for a welcome drink and some more chilling notes from the harpsichord. All the readers were relieved it was over. I kept an eye out hoping that the woman in the shining white dress, with smiling eyes would enter the room. But alas, I never saw her.

Had I really seen and spoken to Emily?

I decided to depart this unsettling and melancholy place.

I said my goodbyes and stepped out into the cold air with only darkness for company as I made my way home.

One thing is for sure, I can't wait to do another reading down the basement of the Heggie Library.

And I hope that I'll meet Emily again.

Simon Collinson is a writer from England. He seeks solitude, sorrow and shadow.

Olaore Raheemat

Between The Lines, Eventually

“How can you love something you’re not good at?” my mom chastised as she picked up clothes strewn across my room. Empty snack wrappers and pizza boxes littered the floor, a testament to my days spent indoors.

I didn’t reply, my glasses perched on my nose, my focus locked on the rejection email glaring at me from my Chromebook screen. The 64th one.

“Go out there and find a real job! You have a degree in Business Administration. See your mates out there—making something of themselves,” she continued, dumping dirty laundry into the basket.

I sighed and leaned back in my chair. “You used to be my biggest supporter,” I whispered, almost to myself.

“That was when your dreams were within reach,” she said, her voice softening as she turned to leave. “But you’re not a hopeful teenage girl anymore. You’re an adult. Dreams don’t pay the bills.” She said before leaving the room, the laundry basket in tow.

I ran a hand through my itchy, tangled braids, tied in a messy bun begging to be loose.

Because I was an *adult*, I got out of my room and went for an interview recommended by my uncle’s friend.

“What makes you think you’re the perfect candidate for this job?” one of the interviewers asked—a petite man in an oversized suit that looked inherited from a long-dead ancestor.

“*The days blurred into a sea of sameness.*”

Because I’m an adult who needs a pay check.

“Uh... I’m a business-oriented person with skills in teamwork, organization, and...”

“It says here you’re 24 years old. Any prior experience or internships?”

“No, but I assure you—”

By the time I left the interview room, I had forgotten the questions and my own answers.

That night, I lay on my bed, reading an ARC from a friend whose debut novel was set to be released by a prestigious publishing house. My mom barged into the room, ecstatic.

“Have you checked your email? You got the job!”

“What?” I said, cheesecake halfway into my mouth.

“I talked to your uncle, who talked to his friend who talked to an insider. You’re so lucky — they pay

well.”

Yay. Money for book hauls and a new laptop, I thought sarcastically.

“I’ll make *amala* and *ewedu* with *catfish stew* to celebrate!” she said, practically dancing as she left the room.

I sighed, disappointed.

The days blurred into a sea of sameness. Each day I pasted on a fake smile at work, selling products I’d never used to customers who demanded more discounts than humanity. After work, I’d scroll through Critter and X-Gram, where every other post seemed to be: “Thrilled to announce I’ve signed with an agent!” or “Excited to join the So-and-So Publishing Family!”

One of those days, I stumbled upon a 20-year-old author releasing her third book. I felt genuinely happy for her—but a part of me simmered in self-loathing for not trying harder to *escape the wheel I was stuck on*.

“Maybe I should try self-publishing,” I told Mariam, my best friend, as I commuted home from work, itching to get out of my pencil skirt and bra.

“It’s worth a shot,” she said. “Traditional publishing isn’t the only path to your dreams.”

That night, as I stepped into our tiny apartment, a faint spark of joy lit within me. Maybe, just maybe, my life could have meaning again, like when I would write stories in

notebooks and share it to my friends in secondary school to read as I absorb their endless compliments.

But that light was extinguished when I saw my mother lay crumpled on the floor, the life drained from her face.

“Mom? Mom!” I screamed, dropping to my knees. My hands trembled as I shook her. “Somebody? Help me! My mom...!”

Weeks later, I stood in my grandmother’s flat, the smell of jollof rice filling the air. She smiled, taking my hands gently.

“She’s in a better place, my dear. I’m glad you decided to stay with me for a while. Our town may not be as lively as the city, but you’ll find peace here.”

I nodded, forcing a smile.

The days were monotonous. I didn’t have to work; Grandma’s pension and rental income kept things steady. Yet every time I sat at my Chromebook to write, the words wouldn’t come. I would stare at the screen for hours, then wander the quiet neighbourhood where goats and chickens roamed freely, boys played football, and dust swirled on the untarred roads.

One evening, as I returned home, I saw *him*.

He was mowing the lawn, his tank top clinging to his frame, his skin glowing like bronze in the golden hour. I tried not to stare, but when his eyes met mine, my heart stuttered. I quickly looked away, my cheeks burning, and hurried inside. From the safety of my room, I peeked out the window, chin resting on my hands, a smile tugging at my lips.

I remembered him. Years ago,

during a holiday visit to Grandma’s, I had seen him. Back then, I was just a shy teenager, and he was a college student. I couldn’t even dream mustering the courage to approach him. But now, it felt as though the universe itself was winking at me.

“Uhm... Grandma, I saw a guy on the lawn this evening,” I said casually, feigning disinterest as we washed dishes in the dim kitchen light of a lantern. There was no power supply, as usual.

“Oh, Ja’afar? That’s my tenant’s son,” she said, her hands wrinkled but nimble as she scrubbed the last plate. “He comes home for about a month every year to spend time with his mom.”

“Really?” I asked, trying to swat away a mosquito buzzing by my ear.

“A very smart boy. He even tutors students around here for free whenever he’s in town,” she added, passing me the plates to rinse.

“Oh... What does he do for work?”

“I think he works at a pharmaceutical company... something along that line *sha*” Grandma replied thoughtfully, then turned to me with a sly grin. “Why are you asking? Do you like him? Should I talk to him for you?”

“Grandma, please don’t!” I exclaimed, cheeks flushing as she chuckled softly.

The next evening, I sat by my window, watching him tutor a small group of students gathered in our compound. Explaining equations as he scribbled on a portable whiteboard.

“ $z/(z + 15) = 4/9$. Hence, $z = 12$,” he said, and they jotted it down eagerly.

Lord, he’s so good at math! Who wouldn’t swoon over a smart, hot

guy? I bit back a grin, tapping my legs excitedly.

From the safety of my window, I stole glances at him as words finally began flowing freely onto my Chromebook.

And no, I am definitely not a stalker. I’ll talk to him... eventually. I just haven’t found the right moment.

Although we’d already met once, an utterly mortifying encounter at the supermarket. I had been buying

“It felt as though the universe itself was winking at me.”

groceries and, an emergency pack of sanitary pads. When I handed my card to the cashier, she frowned.

“Insufficient funds, ma’am.”

“What?” I gasped, panic creeping in. I could feel the “red army” threatening to arrive any moment, and worse, I was wearing white jeans.

“Here, use my card,” a voice said, smooth and kind.

I turned to see him. Ja’afar. He handed his card to the cashier.

She glanced at me as she processed the payment.

I hadn’t even noticed him walk in. Flustered, I discreetly slid the pack of sanitary pads deeper beneath the other groceries, managing a weak, awkward smile in his direction.

As we left the store, I stuttered, “I... uh... I’ll pay you back once we get home.”

“Don’t worry about it, Aanu,” he said with a smile.

He knew my name. Oh, Lord, he knew my name!

By the time we reached the house, a thousand ideas for stories were buzzing in my mind. As soon as I got to my room, I spun around, clutching my hair in embarrassment, replaying my awkwardness over and over. Then I called Mariam.

“ I get you, love. It’s good to see that spark coming back. ”

“Babe, why are you acting like some love-struck teenager?” she teased. “If you like him, go talk to him. Just be subtle—tell him you’re researching for a book, and your protagonist is a pharmacist... you know, like him”

We laughed until Grandma walked in with a plate of diced watermelon.

“I can hear all your giggling. Tone it down!” she said with a knowing smile. “Don’t worry, Aanu. He’s yours, he just doesn’t know it yet.”

Mariam and I burst into another round of knowing snickers, the sound filling the room.

“Aanu,” Mariam called, her tone suddenly serious. “After everything

that happened with your mom and all, I’m just really glad to see you happy again.”

I shrugged, faint smile curving my lips. “Honestly, everything feels the same, but... I don’t know, there’s this spark inside me. It’s like it’s trying to come alive, especially when I’m writing or even just thinking about him. It’s been so long since I’ve felt that way about anything.”

Mariam replied, her voice soft. “I get you, love. It’s good to see that spark coming back.”

The next day, so as not to sound like a liar when I meet Ja’afar later, I actually started drafting a story with a pharmacist protagonist. By noon, I’d written a significant chunk and went to grab water from the kitchen.

When Grandma came in, she looked... off.

“Grandma, are you okay?” I asked, concerned.

She nodded slowly, her voice trembling. “Aanu... this evening, a toddler was playing on the road. A car came speeding, and it almost hit the child. But Ja’afar saved him just in time.”

My heart swelled. Could he be

more perfect?

“But... Ja’afar didn’t survive,” Grandma whispered, tears welling up. “I’ve been at the hospital with his mother. I only came to change before heading back...”

Her words blurred into white noise. My head spun, and my chest tightened as I quietly retreated to my room, staggering at each step.

I sat on the edge of my bed, staring blankly ahead, struggling to process what I had just heard.

Then, a notification popped up on my laptop screen, but I was oblivious to it. It felt as though every time I picked up the boulder of my life and tried to move forward, life was intent on throwing it back down. And I was exhausted by the endless cycle.

A million thoughts raced through my mind as tears streamed down my face. I didn’t even notice the email notification staring at me from the corner of my screen as I walked to the bathroom, turning on the tap to fill the bathtub.

Email Notification:
Congratulations! Eagle Books is thrilled to offer you a publishing contract for your trilogy.

Olaore Raheemat Adebola is a 21-year-old law student who recently started sharing her work with the world. When she isn’t immersed in fictional books or lost in her thoughts, she enjoys watching movies and series. A weird pluviophile with dreams as big as the sky. She loves chocolate and longs to have a cat one day. You can find her on IG @rainy.reads

Personal Essay

Mary Jane Quintavalla

The Weight of the Mountain

Why do they say that you can't know joy if you've never experienced pain and sorrow? Why do people sell sorrow like the newest attraction that every tourist who travels the world has to see and try at least once in their life?

The world is already messed up as it is; we don't need people to dictate how many stages of grief we need to go through. If you skip stage two and go straight to stage three, you will have to ask yourself what's wrong with you—or They will ask you. You will have to apologize many times after wondering how you can go back to stage one or stage zero. That way, you can make Them happy.

For the longest time, I thought

“ But now I have to tell you, and you have to listen. ”

that if I wanted to feel better, I had to reach my lowest possible point to be granted the honor of ascending the Mountain of Recovery. That is the highest mountain you can imagine, and even if you can't, I'm sure they have brochures with many photographs of it because we are all supposed to walk up there at a certain point in our lives. That is the mountain

you're supposed to want to climb for the rest of your life without stopping, looking around, taking a break, or wanting to jump off. That is how messed up the world is. We can't be content with being in the lowlands, the valley, or even on a hill. No! It is required to get the whole experience.

How can you measure a person's worth, value, or strength if they have never found their way out of the hole they created for themselves to be accepted by the world? Can a person be granted the right to cry if they have never experienced grief and pain? Can a person say they are in love without ever being loved?

This world is so messed up; you need to get a ticket and wait in the darkest, moldiest, creepiest room for what seems like an eternity just to receive permission to ascend The Mountain. While I was waiting for my turn, I started observing the people around me: a flock of crows crying their last tears, drinking the last glass of poison, tearing off their feathers and trying to sell them to the seat next to them. Basically, doing what they liked most, for the last time. I did not understand why they were doing this. Why aren't they saving themselves for the journey ahead of us? Why are they so Vulnerable and Stupid? Maybe, just maybe, they were doing all this to survive. To hide. So I stood up,

went on my knees, and started howling at the Moon.

But now I have to tell you, and you have to listen. Please listen.

I've tried to walk and sweat all my tears away. I've tried to say that I like staying where I am and that I might want to take a break for a moment. But they look at me as if I just said I love myself or something like that. They look at me like I should probably take another round down There because the first time wasn't enough for me. How can she want to stop here? they say. How can she choose for herself? And I can't; I didn't.

I stopped explaining myself because I found it a waste of valuable and precious breath. The air up here is so dense, and everybody's breaths are already pushing their way through my lungs. It's intoxicating. They whisper loud prayers to the wind, and I want to scream at them, It can't hear you! They can't hear you! But I can't because they won't listen. So they keep walking up the mountain on the same path, and they drag me back up with them.

They push and pull me in different directions and in ways I would never have taken by myself. I want to scream, Let me stay where I am! Let me feel the pain even if I'm already up here, even if we are close to reaching the top. Let me feel the pain even if I'm not supposed to!

But I can't say that. Instead, I try to stay as still as I can. And I think.

I've been thinking a lot for quite some time in this not-so-quiet place I am in right now. 'If I didn't think, I'd be much happier,' someone once said. But I can't stop; it's the only thing that is actually mine. The only thing they haven't taken from me yet. I have been thinking, and I have been thinking about what it would feel like to jump.

Jump and not think. Not think about how this world has made you believe that life has to be unbearable, that life has to be centered around how much pain

you can feel and endure. How life has to be the ashes you are going to be reborn into, like a Phoenix. And this rebirth is going to make you stronger. All this pain is going to become useful one day, they say. I think about what they would think about not feeling things. No pain. No grief. No anxiety. No regret. I think about what I would think about not feeling anything at all, for once. The word "numb" and all its meanings start to make their way into my brain, gently caressing my soul. I can feel it. I let it in, let it take over my thoughts. All of me. And it blinds me.

I can't see where I have to go

anymore, but I'm not worried, and I am certainly not scared. Now I have a valid excuse for not walking up the mountain anymore. Now I have an excuse to stop. A valid excuse for Them. For Them to give me a ticket that probably says I am now exonerated from the club, that I can stop running, sweating, and pacing. I am exonerated from this round. The ticket must say that I have to run back down the mountain and into the new special black hole they reserved for me.

The thing is, I can't read the ticket because now I'M BLIND. So I smile to myself and choose to Jump.

Poetry

Adonis Alegre

I Come Here With a Farewell's Hand

There is an end to the things that seem like forever,
like the sunken-ship of the self
in the sea of life;
and at the end of the shore,
the dreamers and the feelers
came kneeling as they raised their minds
holding it long enough to be
flower-heads.

O seed of thought! Hallelujah!
There is still goodness in people:
some are late bloomers, and some are early—
then they become *wonderers* I know.
To good life with you! O gardens of gardens!
There is a good beginning to the things
that seems like nothing
and unknown,
but to the dreams of a dreamer,
to the love of a lover, you have come so far
and you have come so bravely.
Today is the funeral of this old pen.
O brave of the braves!
To exile with you! Ocean of inks!
I come here with a farewell's hand,
with paper boats, and fractured ones,
and I, the mad writer,
will tap! tap! tap! tap! all these typewriters!
To exile with you! Ocean of inks!
This ever-changing is the surest thing of all.
And with this, I say to you—
that the same old place can be a good place again.
A good ending
is a destination that you can stay
happily
as long as you want to.
O good place! Same place! I am! I am!
(my home came back from retirement too).
This could be my last sail at this moment,
or forever,
for I am taking a flight and rest.

O wings of good books to read! Take me where?
Take me there. Away from here.
I will be outside of my land and be healthy,
I promise,
but I will leave my pen for now
and soon, if I ever gone or given to sail again,
*I will write to the night sky
and smell the heavy rains until the morning sun comes.*

Adonis Alegre, 24, was born and raised in the Philippines. He graduated from Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University where he finished his English Studies. His poems have appeared or forthcoming in *Levitate Magazine*, *HaluHalo Journal*, *Redamancy Magazine*, *Querencia Press*, *Livina Press*, *Bakunawa Press*, among others.

Sumayah

To the Boy You Once Were

You despise him for
his actions, his shadows, his lies,
the marks he hid beneath the guise
of bandages torn from shallow cries,
for his heart that bled
until it finally fled.

You despise him for
tainting your brightest skies,
the bitter pills you swallowed
to drown out his lullabies.
Silent echoes drag you back,
to nights painted in black.

He despises himself.
A withered leaf pressed in
the pages of a forgotten tome.
He dug his own grave;
he was never yours to save.

He despises himself
for echoing the words
of someone else's pain.
From a sinking wreck he crawled ashore,
his fire extinguished in the rain;
had it burned, he might remain.

But it's me who I despise the most.
I left you stranded, a spectre on the coast,
alone, fractured, lost in frost,
your childhood, the deepest cost.
I'd cradle your tears as they fall,
catching each one like shards of a wall.

Sumayah is a high school student who loves psychology and enjoys exploring how emotions and relationships shape our experiences. She writes about self-reflection, growth, and the complexities of human behavior. Outside of writing, she's always curious about how the mind works and loves learning new things about psychology. Through her writing, Sumayah hopes to inspire others to reflect on their own emotional journeys.

Kouseyi Saha

Some observations made by the ghost of a dying year

as he floats through the streets thronging with a festive busy-ness
guitar riffs thrum above his head, hanging like static in the air and squeezing into the warmth
of hurrying bodies
he sees humans being as human as they could
gearing up for one grand burial, preparing the shroud for *another one gone by too fast*
the mourning of the *could have been's* quickly replaced by the hopeful *will be's*
the shop windows reflect the bright funeral hues adorning every dark corner
he sees the humans gather in front of the clocktower, chanting away each tick and letting go of
a steamy breath

FIVE

their eyes so very intent on following the minute hand, he catches hints of regret in every blink
FOUR

a childish regret, like letting go of the collection of figurines on one's desk

THREE

he sees them holding their breaths, charging the air around them with anticipation

TWO

lips parted in feverish hunger, of swallowing the minutes whole and spitting out a newborn day
ONE

the sky is charged with jittering sparks of crackers, the spontaneous bursts drowning out the
collective whoop of the gathered crowd

he sees a blurred vision of bodies in embrace, melting away with the shimmering fireworks

he gets caught up in a tornado of transient celebration

amongst the dawdlers scrambling at his fleeting remnants

he sees humans as they are

putting together pieces in their man-made puzzles

searching for the ones they cannot find

between every crack in the pavement, within every stranger's impassive face

the dawn rises, not as bright as last night

the empty streets are littered with broken bottles, jagged edges glinting like sets of grinning
teeth

the ghost stands like a destructor in the middle of the road

the chill of January creeping past him like a goosebump spreading through the skin

he wonders why he wasn't properly buried, why he has to drag his feet through the confetti and
the condolences

maybe because his obituary reads: *gone but never forgotten*

he has seen humans being as humane as they can be

what they bury, he understood, they wish for it to come back and haunt them forever.

Kouseyi Saha is currently pursuing a Master's in English Literature from the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. She had always been passionate about reading and writing poetry and her works have been published in *Opal Age Tribune* and *Morning Star Literary*.

Andrew Brindle & Christina Chin

Winter Wind

winter wind
I hold on
to myself
the shutters
rattle

the last page
of an old journal
winter dusk
a new calendar
on the wall hook

roadworks
at the landslip
a heron glides
above morning traffic
if only I could

Andrew Brindle & Christina Chin

Lengthening Shadows

lengthening shadows
give way to silhouettes
a December dusk
two neighbours
nod

a slow parting
of things we could never hold
drifting cloud shadows
I flip a silverfish
burrowed book

afternoon stillness
listening to songbirds
all that is hidden
a wheelbarrow
rattles past

Andrew Brindle is from the UK and has lived in Taiwan for more than 30 years. These days he finds himself on the northern coast of the island where he teaches, grows vegetables in the hills and writes haiku inspired by the ocean and mountains that surround him.

Christina Chin, a four-time recipient of top 100 in the mDAC Summit Art Contests, exhibited at Palo Alto. She's sole haiku contributor for MusArt book of Randall Vemer's paintings. 1st prize winner of the 34th Annual Cherry Blossom Sakura Festival, and the 8th Setouchi Matsuyama, also published in numerous journals.

Constanza Baeza Valdenegro

Historical Linguistics

The linguist brings back untold memories
that remain in vanished sounds.
How did they utter the first word?
Ancient times, early communication,
following the fresh and wild wind.
Changing times, changing suffixes.

Reconstructing the ancient mind,
drawing lines of continuities.
Meanings vary across the centuries.
Early grammars were built
by structures of the consciousness.
Nothing is the same as it used to be.

How did the Indo-Europeans speak?
None of us was there to hear them.
Extinct languages extend their existence
on yellow pages of books,
forgotten in university libraries,
waiting to be opened.

The linguist brings old memories
that are ready to be told.
Where do we go?
We will understand
if we find out who we were.

Constanza Baeza Valdenegro was born in 1985. She lives in the Chilean countryside. She likes languages, flavoured tea and knowledge.

Ilana T.

Without urgency

Hanging in the air
Notched to the centre of the sky like a painting so bright vivid

The sun without urgency
It shines through the cracks in my heart lighting me up like a stained glass church window

I lay in the grass under the tree. Come and hear it
The heart beating the birds singing the leaves.

Without urgency. I look up to the sky with something like a prayer on my lips

I speak. There is only resounding
silence for my answer. There are worse things
There are worse things.

Ilana T. is a poet from the UK. She has a love for long walks and reading Mary Oliver in the afternoons. She can be found hunched over her desk most days, frantically scribbling annotations into the margin of poetry books.

Amelia Averis

That which must live in the body

You will inherit your life like a house.
Where someone lived once, in this body
In this body that is the room within the room.

Dust shorelines and a doorway in reverie,
the suspicion of a loved thing only known by its suspicion
You will stand blinking like a hoarder woken from sleep —

Nevermind what you had left to discuss with him
Nevermind the longest time only just beginning.
It snowed in Eden and there was someone wise and warm.

this will stay living, known only by the body
like tides and to hibernate, stars enduring in periphery,
You were a cherished thing but you don't remember.
That which makes more sense.

Amelia Averis

As of last Thursday, I don't want to be a poet anymore

I forced surrender from the beautiful things.
In hands not incapable but clumsy
the sun bird folding itself into bedsheets
was crushed in its own perfection.
Do you know what I mean by this?
Don't make me gut the golden days.
'the old house' means everything it could ever mean
but only to you - so how to write well?

I want to paint! Not hold to ransom,
the laughter smudging a room with god how good we have it.
There are the layman verse of what I cannot make anything else
The linked fingers in sleep, you have been perfection many times.
You have been a hearth.
The fox in the snow is a fox in the snow
But also a gash, the most weightless thing falling around it.
The Sign, I too fall, but to my knees,
Know what it means, please know how much it means.

Amelia Averis

This is your oldest friend

the January light grinning like Fate,
gleaming sharp but gentle in the eyes
knowing
Here is everything that is new, here is the most familiar thing.

Here is where you watched the last sunset,
To *return* is not to be assumed, but things do.
where now, you watch another.
and so, or perhaps because?
there is something that comes back, even after years.

You are your oldest friend but you must wait to become it
And to say 'i've always known' (even though you always have)
You can go, now
its ready for you:

The beach returning, the slick
reflecting the sky, and you between it all
Watching the world overflow,
between the gauze sky and the wet desert
becoming the pink water sun.

The organs of **Amelia Averis's** poems can be found in her nine years of journals. She navigates a world in which we live amongst memory. You can find more of her work in her debut chapbook 'as the ink birds split the sunset' (*Alien Buddha Press*).

Deepti Kolte

The Rides

I look back to me riding the pillion behind my father on his scooter.
Joy rides. I sat carefree hugging him, watching with eyes so eager,
All the fun on the sides, as he drove through the tricky streets. He was my anchor.

I look back to me riding in a rickshaw with my mother by the side.
Fun rides. Holding her warm hand through the bumpy rides,
Giggling and swaying in the roller coaster. She was with me in my strides.

I look back to my first ride, me rapidly pedalling my bicycle.
Merry rides. The rapturous feeling of being an unhinged bubble,
Grasping views beyond my own little world. I was creating my own circle.

I look back to riding my first mini fancy two-wheeler.
Amusing rides. Riding the wheels with responsibility & cheer,
It felt like growing up with every drive. I was becoming a fine rider.

Deepti Kolte believes in poetry's transformative power. Her poetry book, "The Light at the Edges," won the Sahitya Sparsh Award '24. Her poems have appeared in anthologies like *The Mountain was Abuzz*, *Spring Showers*, and international peer journal *Creative Saplings*. In addition to her writing, she is a marketing professional and champions mental health awareness through her top ranking podcast, 'Mental Health Musings - Yellowcheer.'

Idris Ibrahim

Islands are Reminders of Sinking

Ships

I love you in every universe.

It's not that I don't want to care or want someone to care for me.

I'm just scared.

- Stephen Strange

Take me to a place, where there are
beaming lips singing to an orchestra
of lonely love songs under the
coverings of a few vineless palm trees.

In this place, I want to be an infant,
with an infectious urge to remember
the smell of her garments in everlasting
bits of bloated memories seized by the
intermittent projections of a lifetime spent together.

Adulting.

Maturing.

Adopting a venerated sensation
in her morning words and evening smiles.

But I guess I lied to myself,
that I would find someone similar
on an island of uncommon people
with matching faces; that I would breed
the same feeling in an estate with hefty mansions;
and that I would have the same thoughts,
if I stood at random bus stops.

My existence in this loop,
of trying to re-attach what it is, that
I remake of who she is, has led me to become
a castaway with washed out desires. Wasted like
floating plastics in the middle of an ocean.

Idris Ibrahim

21st Boulevard

News of my mother's death reached me,
while the Angels in the echo mourned in an
unidentifiable voice that summed up the image of
grief as not just a form of pain, but also as a
sinful bruise that never heals.

Life came crashing, like a pack of cards
as the drunkenness of the sky matched the
abyss of my soul. For the moment, the confluence
of my tears and the pouring rain streamed down the
sewers of 21st Boulevard, to the marshy shorelines
of an unnamed place, that steals happiness.
Everyone sends their condolence, but since
when did I transition from being a boy to a man?
For them to think that I wouldn't be a victim
of the raging fangs of absence,
and how did they not realize
that words at this point, were nonetheless a void within
my barely filled lungs.

The air became thinner, as her lifeless body
was laid to rest. In between the hymns of regret
and weary cries, candles are lit over my head as
an offering of mournful prayers, and as the following days,
turned into months, I kept on chasing footsteps of a
homeless ghost that visited me every night; or perhaps,
it is a reflection of myself that I have been chasing after,
on a long road that leads to a place of peace.

Idris Ibrahim

Sacrament

Pain lives in the articulation of words
that is too heavy for the tongue to carry,
so why not keep me a calendar of unlettered months
so I can memorize just numbers,
to keep me numb for unsaid years,
till I pass out.

But before then,
trace a sketch on my skin,
with sulphuric acid to interject
my body into a wall-stone of worship.
And make my nakedness become a living temple,
for sensual lovers to self-glorify their intimate thoughts when they stare at me.

The silence in my ears,
cuts through the spaces between,
unfolding waves. In the warm epicentre of the city, there are flocks of ordinary men,
aspiring to have conversations with spirits. In the steady traffic on a cornered road,
there is a boy who sits on a pavement and stares as his dreams wash up with the daylight.

And in my not-so-lucky life, I still wish
for ember stones that appear
late in February, to come reflect
a sign of cosmic miracles while I gather my thoughts,
at the beach's far end,
where my view is in between the land and waters.

Idris Ibrahim is from Northern Nigeria and writes from anywhere his soul is able to connect with the blessings of life's bittersweet symphony. His works have appeared in *The Belfast Review*, *The Institutionalized Review*, *Cloudscent Journal*, *The Kalahari Review*, *The Brittle Paper*, and elsewhere. Outside writing, he enjoys debating, soccer, and experiencing the beauty of literature in nature's testimony.

Elizabeth Barton

My Great Grandmother

She used to read by candlelight,
the candle burned to a nub.
Or until the flame spluttered in wax,
or her eyes, too tired to read,
took her to a world of dreams.

The future. When I was born.
The past. When she sailed from England.
Long after she was scarcely a memory
I slept in the same room where she died
and read through nights by candlelight.

In soft darkness I listened to music
spun out from an old radio in the room.
Guiomar Novaes played the last sonata,
Beethoven's ultimate work, as if stepping
into the stars and leaving Earth behind.

Great grandmother was a gifted pianist;
it could have been her in the room,
a poignant ballad startling my ears.
Breathtaking by such music, the way
she played; so new, shattering my world.

The mood evoked that night hung over me
for years. A lingering melancholy, the smoke
of a snuffed out candle, strange incense
proved my path. As if my guiding forbear,
for whom I was named, was always with me.

Years later, I stumbled upon a vinyl disc
of the music I heard that fateful night. Novaes,
rare talent and force of nature, was denied
the benefits of the best studios because she,
a woman, lived in a proscriptive age.

Yet no one matched her playing, a virile sound
shone unimpeded in lack-lustre recordings.
A voice that was hers alone burned my life

on a singular path. The risk that she might
be muted because she didn't suit the bias
of her age was the risk of my ancestor's journey,
kindling a spark begun from an old world
daring unknown lands. Unknown futures spun
the threads which became my life, woven
with voices never destined for silence.

Elizabeth Barton is an artist and poet from New Zealand with poetry published in numerous journals and anthologies including *Vita Brevis Press*, *Literary Revelations*, *Flights* and *Spillwords.com*. She is the author of the award-winning pamphlet *Mirrored Time* from *Hedgehog Poetry Press*, and *All Revolutions Begin This Way* and *Auroral*, both from *Alien Buddha Press*. Her art is in private and public collections worldwide including the *V & A Museum Prints Collection*, London.

Priya Evans

Acquainted. Acquitted. Acquiesce.

He bows his head.
A passing figure, unknown, unheard.
His dimple twitches, his fingers dance.
A muse, a hidden melody, a place I am not privy.
His church is barren, his altar echoing.
It burns to touch the frame, my fingers shaking.

He lifts a hand.
A face familiar, a life loosely tethered.
His name commands a holy meaning.
I spit out the sour seeds, the leftover consonants.
Unwanted in avoidance, the sunflower strains
Away from the moon reaching for warmth.

He speaks in truths.
The worthy will fall in line, arms extended.
Unearth the corpses, bury the living in their place.
Chin up, eyes down. Kneel at the altar of the empty.
The meek will inherit their feelings.
My fingertips will graze his grace, smoke curling.

Priya Evans is a writer from Ireland. She is currently an English Studies student at Trinity College Dublin.

Kingsley ICHA

Before They Ever Did

Raise the bar so they can't reach it
Let them not make it when they jump.
Yeah, raise the bar for us—
For our sake, let it be an unbeatable challenge.

We laughed out hard when we had our time out.
Oh, how wise they were
To think the heights would make us fret.
Raise the bar, they say?

Only if they knew what heights we've jumped,
Only if they knew what jumps we've made,
Only if they had an idea we have their idea.

Yes, they wouldn't go easy on us;
They would not have us succeed.
And so, we raised the bar ourselves,
Way before they ever did—
Higher than they ever will.

Kingsley ICHA

A Piece Of Her Heart

A piece of her heart to you I give,
I pray you accept it in good faith.
Though not mine, yet to you I give,
I pray you, accept it in good faith.

It's her organ; hence, I give you just a piece
That she may leave with the rest.
And if ever the ride sways south,
That she may live with the rest.

It's her space; hence, I give you just a piece.
If you are an entrepreneur, buy your way up.
A piece I give, that she may keep her place.
Setting up boundaries, raising her walls.

It's her state, her slate,
That you may understand her circumstances,
Her feelings, and her thoughts.
Savor, relish, and evaluate them.
But remember, it's only a piece.

A piece of her heart,
Not mine to give; hence, I lease—
That, in the end, it'll be returned.
Handle with care, for it's only a piece—her peace.

Kingsley ICHA is a budding Nigerian poet. He is enthusiastic about writing and seeks to create life through words. He has written some works but are yet to be published. He tweets @C_Kcha.

Mee *heights*

i built this all myself, brick by hallowed brick, but
god knows, darling, if i am anything,
an engineer i am not, i am just a man with hands and clay
and all the time in the world.
it will hold as long as i stand here alone and do not look down
to see if you might be following me up this tower, as long as
i can pretend we will understand each other all the way to a top.
i don't know where i'm going, just that i have to keep
laying in new stairs.
i am afraid of heights and i do not want to fall.

A girl of many words with passions in many worlds - **Mee** is a high schooler with a burning enthusiasm for writing, music, and baking. When she's not lost in the pages of a good book, she's likely messing up cookie recipes in the kitchen, aggressively debating someone in a Model UN, capturing life's beauty through photography, or strumming out a tune on her ukulele. She also has her own writing site, always seeking fresh ways to connect, grow, and discover.

Adeleke Abdulmalik Olalekan

When It Is Six Months Left

Going out on a sunny day
Shining like the back wheel of a motorcar
Then crossing around a big and gigantic house of thirty thousand capacity
Wooden with resolute bricks and unyielding metal

Filled with thousands of heads listening
To the voice of a sugar-coated man
Speaking with cool calm and melodious voice
Perched atop a lofty tower
His belly swollen like a gestating cow
His head round as a Jabulani ball

Behind him, a pole stands tall
Stretched in cloth of green white green
Another one stretched with cloth adorned by an umbrella
Waving high in the sunlight scene

Saying I am because you are
I wouldn't go there as your ruler but as your servant
Dreaming aloud of a bridge where no river exists
Exactly three years and six months
Of facing his own pocket to fight for you, not the interest of your people
Now it is another six months to look for people's support
His words are too light to carry truth

Adeleke Abdulmalik Olalekan is a young and aspiring poet and writer. He is from Oyo State, Nigeria, born June 5, 2004. He is currently studying English language at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. His work has been featured in various magazines, including *Everscribe Magazine*, *Where in the World Magazine*, and *The Rest*. He is an active member of the Creative Writers Club at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and also a co-founder of the League Young Writers Association. His works often reflect the theme of love and societal issues.

R. Usukhjargal

Always an angel never a god

She was always the friend with kind words,
Always the one with a soft, pretty smile,
Always the good one, a spark of potential.
She was always the writer,
Always the poet,
Always the artist,
Always the composer.

But—

She was never the best friend,
Never the beautiful one,
Never the talent that others saw as rare.
She was never the face people remembered,
Never the one with genius to admire.
Never the story, never the poem,
Never the muse, never the melody.

She was the eyes, watching, waiting, unseen.

R. Usukhjargal
Ghost of my Past

I don't remember her.
She was never at the birthday parties,
never cheering at the big games,
never woven into laughter
or the warmth of late-night talks.
She was no one's first call,
no one's first choice.

She was beautiful, but her face fades like fog,
her smile a fleeting echo,
her name lost in silence.
She filled pages in a small, hidden notebook—
no one ever turned its cover.
She captured a thousand moments in pictures—
no one ever saw them.

She was kindness itself, always asking if you were okay,
yet no one asked her how she felt.
She listened, and they spoke,
but her voice was swallowed whole.
She was there—
yet already fading,
a memory no one remembers.

Sarah Adeyemo

Where is Safe?

Under a moonless sky, the crickets pierce the darkness with chirps
and bear witness when I ask my father: where is safe? In the cathedral,

we doubt the offertory basket, it may cage what will flaunt our bodies at the face of God.
The priest says the presence of God is the only safe place. A year later, his body travelled

the pulpit stairs to the grave. Don't assume I asked God if my priest was in His presence.
On New Year's Eve, my neighbor's son kissed matches: a body metamorphosed into embers.

He couldn't run faster than the wind. He was burning outside and he still burns inside my
memory. My father says, sometimes to leave home is to become a weed. Meaning, in searching

for survival, you may be uprooted from the garden of life. On the fifth of June 2022, there was a
splash of bullets in the house of God. Today, our fellows are stars burning in our history.

Where is it truly safe? We have heard of kings toppled from their thrones and called it an
abomination to the gods. When Central Market became ashes, we wept, not for gold but for

our mothers who became Lot's wife. We have been counting such stories that mock humanity
like beads of rosary. When home becomes a den and foreign land becomes a trap, fear colours

my voice to ask where else is safe.

Sarah Adeyemo, Swan IX, whose works have appeared/ are forthcoming on *The Muse Journal*, *The Weganda Review*, *The Shallow Tales Review*, *Eboquills* and elsewhere. She is the debut author of *The Shape of Silence*. She tweets @SarahInkspires.

Uchechukwu Onyedikam

The Fairchild

Master I am a stranger to you
but will you hear my confession?
I am a dead poet, a faceless child who couldn't walk... laugh... & talk...
but could only crawl, mount a chariot
and sit up tall –
wandering in the street corners
of this city with eyes awakened
with chaos... dreams!

I live in the backyard of your house;
roaming freely, delivering poetry
with tall tales of beauty
in the morning dark.
Humbly I share your table
breaking meat with wildflowers.

I am the FAIRCHILD born into adversity, welcomed with the hands of grief;
here I take up, hold the lapel of life
in this war with reckless abandon
in this ghost town, and seeing
dark dreams through these
bewildered eyes lost in its sockets.

I could have been broken/bedridden
in these pages of this unstable
pseudo-living. I hear the violent
awakening of the ringing cry of
the child that has elevated off
my body. And that same child
was heard to say –
thank you Universe
for showing me the mercy-slayer in me

I am a human vessel
that is half-way-empty & useless...
and that seed that fell by the wayside – disdained; no human aid to nurturing
for growth. Struggled against self...
I grew wild and fiercely independent
in that very self with thorns as badges
of disharmony piercing my side.

I am a true impact produced
by rubbles of the big city,
for this body... is not mine
and upon this fairground
it goes up for rent.

I know you detest me, I can see the judgement bare in your eyes,
and the fire of damnation burning
furiously in your eyes; even though
you shiver & cower in fear
as your eyes meet mine.

You stripped me naked
and left the traces of your whip
all over me. You robbed me...
of my belongings at gunpoint
and crushed my face against this concrete wall of my father's because I challenged
the unjust killings of my brother.

You stole my virginity and infiltrated my distilled spirit with your political rhetorics chopping
my sanity – piece by piece.

As heaven falls down upon even darkness
my head loaded with different genres of misery... drops low from my shoulders, revealing the
scar of your growling tooth that had bitten off my left ear, on that day you wrestled with me in
the belly of the dark as I was ministering to the void

Uchechukwu Onyedikam

Don't Forget

Tell her...

he's yesterday and I'm today —
the fingerless hands that
offered sacrifice
at her altar

Tell her...

that I saw her shadow floating
upon the face of the sea
and felt her scent fleeing
through the wind

Tell her...

I saw her image painted in my dreams
and that she's beautiful and tomorrow is her reflection brimmed with ideal hopes & dreams even
though she feels...
her past — haunting,
present — dead & disappeared
into the void, instead

Tell her...

she could take back tomorrow's wishes
broken by yesterday's err today —
and that the sun is out to play
in the garden

Tell her...

there's a sofa in the living Land wide
enough to rest upon as she's traveled
far off on sore foot — weary of heartache
and burdened with love

Tell her...

life's a cursed bird
perching on death
relaying Evil & Bad

Don't forget —
tell her...

not to snipe
for the tongue that lied
was the mouth that touched her spine
leaving her with the smell
of a skunk

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Future Issues

We're thrilled to announce that our next issue, Issue No. 6, *Scriba Vita*, will be coming soon! Everscribe releases a new issue every 1st of the month, so stay tuned!

Writers can always submit their works through our website at everscribemag.com. Join our community by connecting with us on our [Discord server](#), where both writers and readers are welcome. Stay updated on issue releases, special opportunities, news, and more by following us on [social media](#).

For inquiries or questions, feel free to reach out to us at info@everscribemag.com. We hope you enjoyed reading Everscribe's fifth issue, and we extend our thanks to all the writers for making this dream come true!

Until next time,
The Everscribe Team

