

Everscribe

MAGAZINE

ISSUE NO. 7

LITTERA NOVUS

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

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Table of Contents

Editor's Note	iii
Scribe's Corner	1
Interview with Leanne Drain	2
Interview with Uchechukwu Onyedikam	3
Fictional Short Story	4
Daniela Tabrea <i>In the Queue</i>	5
Zary Fekete <i>Plumbing</i>	7
Pamela Zero <i>Object</i>	11
Declan D. Edge <i>Treasure of All Ages</i>	14
Kaavya Sivakumar <i>The Watchman</i>	17
Uduak-Abasi Ekong <i>The Mirror Does Not Lie</i>	19
Máté Mrsan <i>Finding Myself</i>	22
Sara Siddiqui Chansarkar <i>Binary Stars</i>	25
Essay	26
Brandi-Ann Uyemura <i>The Great Divide</i>	27
Poetry	29
Sam Aureli <i>Blueberries for All</i>	30
James Aitchison <i>Of the broken land</i>	31
Uchechukwu Onyedikam <i>Silent Whisper</i>	32
Christina Chin & Uchechukwu Onyedikam <i>The Breaking Point</i>	33
Terence Young <i>When We Had Wings</i>	34
Tanishq Kalra <i>A Faded Cover</i>	35
Roy N. Mason <i>Caffeine Kick</i>	36
<i>Balance</i>	37

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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Table of Contents

Sirjana Kaur	<i>This is Not the First Small Death</i>	38
Vern Fein	<i>Diamonds and Gold</i>	39
	<i>Popcorn Revenge</i>	41
Zeina Ash Tayir	<i>Displacement</i>	42
	<i>Radiance</i>	43
Cam Joyce	<i>Last Night Liminal</i>	44
	<i>Refraction</i>	45
Kirk Lawson	<i>A wound is an opening</i>	46
	<i>In concert with</i>	47
Toshani O.S. Nath	<i>Immortality of a Memory</i>	48
Blaire Baron	<i>Incident at the Mission</i>	49
Chris Graves	<i>Signal and Noise</i>	50
Dasha Spintov	<i>Etched On February's Stars</i>	52
Hiram Larew	<i>Starfish</i>	53
Kaitlyn Sun	<i>Shedding</i>	54
Rachel G Maron	<i>Holy Hugs</i>	55
Lanre Sonde	<i>To Your Earth</i>	56
	<i>Seasons</i>	57
Linette Rabsatt	<i>Needing Someone</i>	58
Jim Murdoch	<i>Codetta</i>	59
	<i>Better Reasons</i>	60
Kinsey Krachinski	<i>Dreams of My Future Child</i>	61
	<i>Juxtapositional Offense To The Starry-Eyed Poet</i>	62
Gina Freyre	<i>He/Streamlined He</i>	63
Prithvijeet Sinha	<i>SENTINEL</i>	65
Arthur Neong	<i>Ghazal: Migrant</i>	67
Ramiro Valdes	<i>Chronic illness</i>	68
Acknowledgements		iv
Future Issues		v

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 beyond excited to share the seventh issue of Everscribe with you — *Littera Novus*, meaning “New Letter.” It's a name that speaks to the very core of storytelling: how each word we write becomes a vessel for something new.

This issue is especially close to our hearts. Not only is it bursting with remarkable talent, it's also our largest issue yet! The number of submissions we received was staggering, and the quality even more so. To every writer who shared their work with us — thank you. Your voices are bold, brilliant, and deeply felt across every page.

Most of all, this month, we're celebrating someone truly special: [Art Keating](#), our Managing Editor and the backbone of Everscribe Magazine. It's Art's birthday, and we couldn't let this issue pass without honoring them. This magazine wouldn't be what it is without Art.

I hope this issue inspires you, stirs something in you, and reminds you why storytelling matters. We're grateful you're here.

With warmth and wonder,

Dafia

Founder & Editor-in-Chief

Scribe's Corner



Word of the Month!

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

Wane is the soft retreat, the gentle dimming. As winter finally gives way and spring edges in, there's a sense of quiet undoing. Not everything bursts into bloom at once. Some things fade first. Wane is the hush before renewal, the ebb before the flow. It's the pause where reflection lives, where stories deepen. Want to help choose our next Word of the Month? Vote in our polls on Discord and social media!



Literary Technique Spotlight

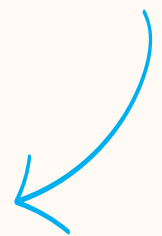
Sometimes, contrast creates clarity. This month, our spotlight shines on juxtaposition—the technique of placing two contrasting elements side by side to highlight their differences. Whether it's light and dark, rich and poor, hope and despair, the best writers use juxtaposition to sharpen emotions, challenge assumptions, and add depth to their storytelling.

Take Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*. The novel famously opens with: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."

Question for our Scribes...

March is a month of in-betweens — winter fading, spring arriving, warmth brushing up against cold. It's a time of contrast. So we're wondering: how do you use juxtaposition in your writing or your life? Where do you notice opposites colliding — beauty and pain, joy and sorrow, light and shadow? Tell us: what moments stand out more because of what they're placed next to?

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



Interview with

Leanne Drain

Published in [Issue No. 3, Pulsus Litterae](#).

Leanne Drain, age 30, loves writing poetry and short stories. Has a passion for writing completed a degree and has a great knowledge of written poetry such as haikus , prose and elegy.



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

I love writing and poetry has something I have always found refreshing, however, I wanted to write the haikus because I enjoy the syllable count and structure. It's also been a journey, one that I will always take into my life.

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

Mental health awareness, light through life and the world we live in. Writing hasn't always come easy, I had to face my own difficulties, mental illness loss, and bullying. Also I learned a lot through the process of my health.

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

My writing has improved through the inspiration of loved ones. My grandad is who I look up too, he's no longer with us but he was the main reason I started writing, I'm forever grateful for the time I had with him.

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

Never give up! There is so much potential in your work, you just got to believe. No matter how hard the industry is, never give in because there is light and one day something will strike in your work. Writing is a process. Enjoy.

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

I'm excited to see where my next adventure takes me.

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

I have a Twitter/X account that I tweet at @drainleanne

Everscribe is thrilled to have published talented writers like Leanne Drain! We thank you for choosing Everscribe as your literary home. Read Leanne Drain's poetry "**Haikus**" in [Issue No. 3, Pulsus Litterae](#)!

Interview with *Uchechukwu Onyedikam*

Editor's Choice poet and published in *Issue No. 2, Vox Novum, Issue No. 3, Pulsus Litterae, Issue No. 4, Musa et Verbum, Issue No. 5, Aeternum Scriptor, Issue No. 6, Scriba Vita,* and *Issue No. 7, Littera Novus.*

My name is **Uchechukwu Onyedikam**; a Nigerian poet/photographer; I live in Lagos; where I always try my best to escape the hustle and bustle of the City: Èkó Ilé! — the hope that harbours me away from despair; and that, shields me with her feminine Love. I was born July 1st, 1987. I missed my late parents, most especially my mother; she's the sweetest thing ever; my Hail Mary!

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

My African culture; my immediate environment; my language; my myth & philosophy; the life & times of my mother — I like to think of her as my halo, the light I'm standing in, in this dark world of man.

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

When you engage the works of art I've created; and try to understand the language in which it was raised — and nurtured, you shall be able to have your own interpretation and

representation, and form your own story.

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

Knowing Christina Chin have indeed revolutionized my writing career; working together with her on different projects thus far have been quite a wonder! Writing Haiku and Tan-renga; these great forms of poetry, is actually influencing how I think and write — and create art!

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

You know, this may sound pretty



much like a clichè but that's what is real: "Be Yourself," for when you strive hard in sustaining your authentic "self" then, there will be no competition!

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

In 2025; brimful of tangible things coming — I look forward to more collaborative projects.

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

Twitter: @MysticPoet_ where I live and dream; honing my craft.

Everscribe is thrilled to have published talented writers like Uchechukwu Onyedikam! We thank you for choosing Everscribe as your literary home. Read Uchechukwu Onyedikam's beautiful poem, "**Silent Whisper**," selected for Editor's Choice on [page 32](#) or on our [website](#)!

Fictional Short Story

Daniela Tabrea

In the Queue

It was 4:30 AM when Mrs. Toader left home. The frigid air was more pleasant than the humid atmosphere in the one-bedroom apartment, where she lived with her daughter, son-in-law and two grandchildren.

Walking across the small town of Pascani, Mrs. Toader could feel her joints loosening. *Sugar and oil. Flour-next time.* She murmured to herself as she hurried through the empty streets with quick, small steps, like an old goose. *The lil' one... she doesn't eat... a couple of eggs.* She tightened her headscarf under her chin to gain courage. In front of Holy Cross Church she stopped, crossed herself and bowed to the ground. She crossed herself twice more, her pitiful eyes seeking the rusty iron cross atop the church tower. A slight hunch formed in her upper back.

"God, help us!" she cried and hurried once again.

The queue for eggs was longer than usual, and, to her bitter disappointment, Lucretia from the apartment across the hall was at the very end of the line.

"Good morning, Mrs. Toader. I haven't seen you since last week! Where have you been hiding?" said Lucretia in a high-pitched voice. She was wearing a new coat.

"I've been away in the

countryside. Visiting my elder sister, Rodica."

"Rodica! How's her health? Her legs still upsetting her?"

"That's the other sister. Rodica's the one who lives in Brosteni, just past Draguseni. She's doing well, save for her sclerosis. I brought her some food. Her favorite, potato pancakes. She can't grate, you see—"

"I was in Brosteni last weekend," interrupted Lucretia. She looked around before whispering, "The

*"A seer-in-the-spirit,
he never has a
moment's rest."*

monastery there—have you been? Why, you should! It's small, but there's something so... holy about it. Starets Gherasim serves there. On Saturday dozens of people waited to ask for his blessing. A seer-in-the-spirit, he never has a moment's rest."

"Did you meet him?" asked Mrs. Toader, advancing two steps in the line.

"Of course, I had to! My mother is turning 66 this year and her spirit is not what it used to be. She's always gloomy, sitting all day long, staring into the void. She even stopped sewing now. She complains she can't see very well, but I think she

doesn't want to do any work."

"I pray to the Lord to help her," whispered Mrs Toader, shifting her weight to the right leg, which was less sore.

"May He give me strength to deal with it. Last Tuesday I spent three hours cleaning her house. I did everything—scrubbed the floors, cleaned the windows, washed the curtains... you know what she said when I finished? *You could've changed the lightbulb in the kitchen.*" Mrs. Toader looked at Lucretia's curled mouth and tried to guess what the appropriate reply ought to be. Lucretia continued.

"I told her, Mommy, you don't even cook these days, why bother? She forgets the light on all the time. Such a waste. And imagine how I felt after everything I'd done for her! Not a thank you, nothing!"

Mrs. Toader pulled her headscarf away from her face and scratched her left ear, but her discomfort didn't go away. "So what did Starets Gherasim say?" she asked after a heavy pause.

"Father read my soul in an instant. I kneeled in front of him and only said, *Father, please—*. Lucretia covered her mouth with the back of her leather-gloved hand, choking her emotion. "He looked at me with intent, and told me, *Child, your sick mother will recover, but you must have faith.* He then told

me all the things I ought and ought not do. A heavy boulder lifted off my heart. Such a gifted man, God bless him!" Lucretia pinched the bridge of her nose.

"Indeed..." said Mrs. Toader with thoughtful admiration. "You must've waited for hours to get in."

"Well, I know a nun there—she did me a favor. I was in and out within an hour. If you want to go see Father, I am sure she could arrange a meeting for you. She won't ask for anything in return. Of course, I brought her a loaf of bread and two sets of bed sheets, for the trouble."

Mrs. Toader weighed the possibility in her head and after a moment, she replied:

"Father Gherasim holds a mass every Sunday? Maybe I could write a *pomelnic*..." For the lil' one. She's skin and bones.

"He's 89, but he serves the monastery with such vitality. Last Sunday he delivered the most beautiful sermon I've ever heard." Lucretia squeezed her folded raffia bag close to her chest and whispered, "A camel will more readily go through the eye of a needle than a rich man through the Gates of Heaven." She stared into the distance, as if picturing the camel and the needle.

Mrs. Toader nodded and wobbled a bit further. She, too, could only think of the rich man, the camel and the needle. If Lucretia was the camel in this allegory, what would that make her? A sheep? A goose? The Gates of Heaven seemed wide open—her life's possessions

amounted to only the bare necessities, unlike Miss Lucretia who paraded in a new coat and had bedsheets to spare.

Mrs. Toader snapped out of her trance when she realized it was almost her turn. She looked at the boxes and counted the remaining eggs. Lucretia was busy drawing a few banknotes out of her round purse. Behind her, the queue snaked around the street corner. A young woman carrying a child in her arms left her place further down the line and approached hesitantly. She wore dusty rubber galoshes and a long flared skirt—too thin for the frosty weather. The child slept wrapped up in worn-out blankets.

"Excuse me, ma'am," the young woman addressed Lucretia in a pleading voice. Could you please let me buy an egg? My boy's hungry."

Lucretia looked her up and down and, without pausing for a breath, said, "My neighbor and I have been queuing for hours. And how about all the other people in the queue? They've been waiting too. Don't they have the right to buy what's left?" She grabbed a bag of eggs, and added, "I have a sick mother, you know!" Turning to Mrs. Toader, her tone was measured once again. "I'll see you around, Mrs. Toader! Let me know if you want me to introduce you to... you know."

Lucretia's departure created a void in front of Mrs. Toader. Before stepping in, she peeked sadly at the young woman and shrugged.

"Ten eggs, please!" she said

addressing the cashier.

"These are the last four," said the cashier, handing her a bag of eggs. Mrs. Toader handed over the ration coupon and some banknotes. The cashier crossed off E for Eggs under February, 1989, and said to the next person in line, "That's all!"

News that the eggs were sold out had already spread, and the crowd began to disperse. Mrs. Toader turned to cross the street, but a heavy burden locked her in place.

"A fragile head pressed against his mother's chest."

She could still feel the young mother behind her.

"How old is he?" she asked, turning around.

"Three, ma'am," said the woman, gently swaying the bundle from side to side.

Like my lil' one. Mrs. Toader looked at the small bundle. A fragile head pressed against his mother's chest.

"Do you have a bag?" said Mrs. Toader, pulling out an egg. The woman's face lit up.

"Bogdaproste, ma'am! Good health to you and your family!"

Passing by Holy Cross Church, Mrs. Toader crossed herself, bowed, crossed herself twice more, and breathed out. "Lord, help us!" Her hunched back eased a little.

Daniela Tabrea writes from the local library in Harlem, New York. Born and raised in Romania, she moved across borders to learn physics. Home is where her husband is, and where trees grow.

Zary Fekete

Plumbing

Jeremy knew the plumber had noticed his accent. Everybody did sooner or later. The plumber was mostly facing the sink but was half-tuned toward where Jeremy stood. His head was cocked, hanging on the last words of Jeremy's statement about the leak in the sink but a moment too long for it to be a mere added layer of interest in the vagaries of pipes and plumbing in buildings built before the 20th century in Budapest.

As he learned the language,

“Not bad for an outsider, but still... not quite right, is it?”

Jeremy modulated his voice to speak softly, often allowing his accent to float below the radar of Hungarians if they were only barely paying attention, but anytime a social situation called for more than a curt one or two sentences, a slight undulation from his tongue in the pronunciation of any word with more than two syllables always gave him away. As soon as Jeremy replied to the plumber's greeting and waved off the apology for the lateness of metropolitan buses and got around to introducing the round man to the dripping pipe and describing the last few days of

mopping, he could practically hear the man's mind register:

“Foreigner... English? No American... Not bad for an outsider, but still... not quite right, is it?”

The plumber turned his body full toward the pipe, but talked over his shoulder, “What state are you from?”

“In America?” Jeremy didn't know why he said that.

“Yes. Or is it Canada?”

“No. America. Minnesota.” Jeremy had a fine view of the man's pants from behind. The blue, course material, common among the working class throughout the capital, worn by electricians and gas inspectors and tram drivers. He thought, not for the first time, that there must be some central shop where they all did their clothes shopping. This set off a familiar pinging in Jeremy's head, a desire to belong to this place, to this semi-adopted country where he lived. He wanted to automatically know where men like this went when they needed things and to be sitting next to them when conversations happened. The pants were held up by a brown canvas belt, stained by the imprint of hundreds of grimy fingerpresses, from which an oily leather pocket hung containing all kinds of pliers and hammers.

“MEEN-esota”, the plumber said with emphasis standard to all

Hungarian words. “That's where now? By Texas?”

“No. You know where Chicago is?”

“Not really.”

“North and center. Just below the Canada border.”

“So, I was half-right then about Canada,” the plumber said with a grunt as he straightened up from the sink. He fished one of the pliers from his leather pocket and beckoned Jeremy to the kitchen sink. Jeremy experienced a moment of unexpected pleasure when the plumber placed a large, meaty hand on his shoulder and gestured back toward the kitchen sink down the short hallway. “You'll be my assistant now. I'll need you to turn the main off in a moment.”

He left Jeremy to reach the kitchen sink on his own and returned to the small bathroom where he ran water into its sink without looking at it. He glanced below his faucet-grasping arm while he rustled through his bag at his feet with the other, eventually pulling out a wobbly gasket. Jeremy opted at this moment to continue his train of thought and said, “Minnesota is the third coldest state in America.”

“Really?” The plumber was not entirely interested. He pointed at Jeremy and made a twisting motion, after which Jeremy turned off the

faucet below the kitchen sink. “Thank you,” the plumber said.

As the big man filled the small bathroom with artisanal movements involving pliers and twine, a peaceful sense settled over Jeremy. Earlier that morning, likely due to the drip from the sink, an overactive sense of imposter syndrome had troubled his thoughts. Self-doubt, mixed with the blurry veil of waking, trailed after him when he fumbled with his morning toothbrush and face-washing, enough so that Jeremy wondered if he might have been dreaming of personal failure all night. On his way to the kitchen, he had to pass the bookshelf containing the two half spheres of his world: language books and theology texts, their pages populated equally with simplistic life-cadences and convoluted summations of existential guidance... where it was possible to smile and nod along with a young woman finding satisfaction in the correct pronunciation of the sentence “I would like to buy a dozen roses, please” and equally likely to marvel that anyone could be saved if the life standard was the holy otherness of God. But now, seeing the plumber twist his wrist and loosen this and that, the idea that some things did have answers settled over Jeremy like a sweet balm. “This is how it’s meant to be,” he thought. “Sometimes it just requires the right person come by to prove it.”

Jeremy’s thoughts were interrupted by the plumber’s raised hand with a single finger beckoning. “Help me with this?” he asked.

Jeremy stood still for a moment. He hadn’t expected to be brought in

to the close, side-by-side working confidence of the plumber. He felt momentary worry. What if his assistance was more of a bother and the man quickly dismissed him? It seemed that would be too much for the morning to bear. And yet, here was an opportunity.

The plumber, still not looking but speaking with a voice betraying no sense of whether he had been waiting for Jeremy’s response, asked, “Coming, then?”

His mind quietly determined, Jeremy stepped forward, purposely landing a foot loudly on the hallway floor so the worker would hear him approach. “Yes.” His voice sounded clipped, perhaps brusque. Jeremy added, “Four hands are better than two, I imagine.” It was a nonsensical thing to say.

“Your sink could benefit from a new faucet,” the plumber said.

Jeremy nodded (unsure why since the plumber was turned away and couldn’t see him) and noted that his heart was beating more quickly than usual as the man looked down and searched through his bag on the bathroom floor and then pivoted back up with a new instrument, a flathead screwdriver,

“It seemed that would be too much for the morning to bear.”

proffered toward Jeremy in his large right hand while he continued to maintain a grip on the lower pipe with his left. Jeremy noticed that a length of twine now hung limply from the man’s mouth, its end pinched delicately between teeth, with just enough tension to allow

an apple’s skin to be pierced, mid-bite. “Fit that into the seam there,” the plumber said, as Jeremy took the offered instrument and bent toward the faucet. It pleased him to feel that the man trusted him with his work, not just in the task of the faucet but in the closeness of their two sets of arms, the tendons and muscles of which slid neatly this way and that in the choreography of loosening and torque application. “Just a bit more,” the man’s voice was steady, confident. “Thank you,” he said, the moment the faucet head finally came loose and clattered into the white bowl of the sink. A few pent-up drops of clear fluid overflowed from the now-headless faucet neck, and Jeremy cautiously daubed at it with a handful of quickly gathered toilet paper from the roll next to the toilet on the wall.

“Good,” the plumber said, as he finished his own wrist revolutions on the pipe below and uncovered a slightly rusted extension of steel threads on the now-exposed lower joint. Jeremy’s task done, he stepped back, re-establishing the larger man’s authority in the small space and freeing up the air for a spot of conversation.

“What brings you to Budapest?” the plumber asked.

“Missions work.”

“Oh? Any kind in particular?”

“I work at an orphanage. The leadership invites me as a guest teacher on moral topics.”

“Ah. That’s needed.” The man sounded about as interested as he had about Minnesota’s cold weather.

The fact that his work involved the Christian gospel mattered to Jeremy deeply. The figure of Jesus

towered in his world to such a degree as to make all other matters trivial by comparison. He tacked on the comment “The Bible has some helpful passages regarding children” without a hint of apology or sheepishness. Since he converted to Christianity over ten years ago, a kind of guileless, open-faced acknowledgement of humanity’s need for divine help accompanied most of his approach toward daily life. He often caught himself so sure-footed in his thoughts about God as to make himself almost blush with embarrassment and immediately cast up a small prayer of confession for the sin of pride he knew he

*“There were things
Jeremy could
understand.”*

harbored. And yet there was often just as likely to be caustic moments of deep doubt about God’s personhood and personalness, a chasm that opened at unexpected moments of Jeremy’s day when he despaired that anything could be done to heal the world. Ironically, at those moments too he felt an overpowering need to confess his thoughts in prayer.

In fact, he was prepared to mutter a spot of confession at that moment had the plumber not said, “The Bible. That’s holy scripture, you mean?”

“That’s right.”

“Could you quote me some of that?”

“I can’t think of any just now,” he apologized, unconsciously glancing toward his book-shelf as though it

could supply him with a burst of inspiration.

“No matter.” The plumber did not seem put out. “Take that, please.” He nodded toward the decapitated faucet languishing in the small sink. Jeremy reached down and grasped it. “Thank you,” the man said.

The peaceful feeling settled back over Jeremy as the plumber turned again into the confines of the small bathroom. He watched the man execute simple movements, practiced and refined over years of habit. Jeremy imagined for a moment all of the dripping pipes throughout the city. Mothers and fathers, young men and women, all stumbling across unexpected puddles at the start of their days or in the evening hours after dusk. The plumber represented to him at that moment the absolutely crown of good, an essential feature of life, someone who existed as a supreme answer to a very real, tangible problem that everyone would someday have.

The plumber reached his hand back toward Jeremy, silently requesting the faucet. Jeremy put it in the outstretched palm. “Thank you.” The man went back to his work.

There were things Jeremy could understand. Others he could not, like why there was human abandonment. Why the photos that sharpened his senses to the plight of the young: the orphanages after the dictatorships fell. Small children, their eyes hollow, voices brittle, lives already scarred, conspicuously not by physical wounding but by the actual absence of touch. He wondered how God could endure His own weight of eternity when it came to those lives.

What emotion did He feel as He watched them, these preposterous, earnest children?

And the universe? Black. Cold. Eternal? Theologians spoke of infinite love, infinite grace, but could they have meant *that* infinite? Could God’s arm stretch far enough to reach the lost? Jeremy sometimes saw teens who, unlike the orphans, had families, mostly, but who were now sucked into a different void of abandonment, an absentee parent attached to their hands at all times. Once, in a moment of cultural curiosity, Jeremy had asked one of the orphanage workers if she believed in hell. She had laughed and gestured toward the dimly lit hallway, the drab walls, the echoing marble. “Hell?” she said. “Here it is.”

Jeremy shook his head, uncertain how his thoughts had carried him so far.

“There,” the plumber said, pressing down on the faucet head. “Would you turn on the main again?” With his foot he gently pushed his tool bag across the threshold of the bathroom so Jeremy could see it wouldn’t be needed anymore. He was very kind.

“You have many tools there,” Jeremy said to him.

“Many for many needs,” the plumber said, testing the water’s flow from the faucet.

“How do you keep them organized?”

“My kids. A boy and a girl. They go through the bag each morning before I go. I think they know the tools better than I do,” he said.

For the first time Jeremy noticed a ring on the man’s finger. On the right, the place for the wedding ring in Hungary. The plumber

cleared his throat. It was not the action of a man who needed to clear his throat but of one who has finished his work and could do what he wants. "You can leave that on now," he said, pointing below the kitchen sink where the main faucet was. "If you have any more problems, just give me a call."

Jeremy concentrated his attention. He longed to thank the man, to explain somehow what this short time meant to him. Since he could think of nothing appropriate

to say, he said instead, "I don't believe I've ever talked with a plumber before."

"Really? Why not?"

"I don't know. The place I lived in Minnesota had staff who handled those kinds of things."

"Interesting." The plumber picked up his bag and turned to the front door. "Well, so long, then."

Jeremy stepped forward, uncertain if he should offer his hand. At that moment, the man

turned back.

"Ah, I've just thought of one," he said.

"One?"

The plumber's eyes momentarily took on a look of remembrance. He said, "*Children are a heritage from the Lord; offspring a reward from him.*"

The plumber smiled. Jeremy smiled. At that moment the sink swallowed its last mouthful of water, sounding like a chuckle.

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

Pamela Zero

Object

The ad for the museum's new exhibit was everywhere, demanding her attention. It showed a photo of a small figurine, a little girl in a pink frock blowing bubbles, set against stark black background. For one week only, see *Nalia, the laughing child*. was blazoned across the top of the advertisement. Cheryl saw it immediately as they entered the baggage area, even with the swirl of travelers circling around them.

"Look mommy! It's my sister," giggled her son, as Cheryl kept a firm grip on his hand.

Cheryl's heart turned inside out, sending pangs of loss radiating through her body. She calmly smiled at her little boy. "And look, she loves bubbles too! Just like you." Her hands started to tremble with grief. She transferred her son's hand over to her husband, Dave.

"Watch Sam, okay? I'll go look for our luggage," she murmured to him, before turning and slipping into the crowd by the baggage carousel.

She had lost the baby six years ago. A miscarriage, the doctor had said, but not why. He had mumbled something about natural selection and waved his hand airily, as if that settled it. For Cheryl, it did not. Five months pregnant, she had known it was a girl, had already imagined her sleeping peacefully, had held a

small, warm baby in her mind. They had already picked a name. Sarah.

The little girl inside her had filled her thoughts back then. She imagined her unborn daughter growing up, her first bike, her first lost tooth, her first day of school. The miscarriage had been painful and bloody, and she'd been hospitalized for three days. Afterwards, she'd tucked the loss away and three years later she'd found herself pregnant with Sam.

Standing by the slowly crawling belt, her heart slowly twisted back into place. She searched for their big black suitcase. There was a dent in one corner, from when it had fallen off the shelf in the garage. Dave had been terribly upset. The luggage had belonged to his parents, and he fussed over trying to fix the damage before deciding that even dented the suitcase was fine. Cheryl was grateful for the dent. There seemed to be a thousand black blocks sailing by her, all the same. She spotted their own slightly marred luggage easily and tugged it off the belt.

People pressed in on her on all sides, and she stood for a few minutes, the suitcase tight against the front of her legs. She let her breath go back to normal and spared a glance at the museum ad, well-lit and high on the wall. The little girl looked exactly like Cheryl

had imagined her unborn daughter would. Blond hair, impish face, slight.

"They had already picked a name."

Back when the *Nalia* exhibit had first arrived in their part of the country, Cheryl had cut out an ad for it from a magazine and put it on the inside of her closet door. She didn't think about why, and at the time her grief still lay simmering, bubbling deeply inside her. Sam had spotted the ad one day and declared the bubble-blowing girl his sister. When reproductions of the figurine started showing up in local stores, she bought one and hid it in her sock drawer. Sam never found that one.

The crowd around Cheryl dissipated as people got their luggage and left. She pulled their suitcase back over to her husband and son, smiling brightly.

"You found it. Great!" said Dave. "Shall we head to the hotel?"

Cheryl nodded and the three of them went out the automatic doors, the wind whipping into them as soon as they stepped outside. She slipped her hand inside her coat pocket and felt the porcelain of the

figurine, smooth and reassuring.

They spent most of the week visiting with Dave's enormous family. Cheryl's face was tight from smiling. The day before their flight home, she sat on the small chair in their hotel room, watching carefully in the mirror as she wove her hair into a crown of braids. David was on the phone with his mom, talking and pacing, with Sam clinging to one leg.

"Really?" he said, his voice hopeful. "Great! We'll see you there! Thanks so much, Mom. Love you."

He hung up and scooped Sam into his arms, giving him a huge hug. "Sammy! Guess what Grannie got us!"

A fish!" said Sam, with great enthusiasm.

"Nope! She got us tickets to the museum. We get to go see the Nalia exhibit!" He turned slightly towards his wife, his face cautiously hopeful. "I told Grannie how much you love the bubble blowing girl Sammy, and she said you absolutely have to see the bubbles in person."

Cheryl felt the room tilt. She carefully tucked the last bit of braid

"Was that a hint of blue under Nalia's eyes?"

up and pinned it into place. Her eyes in the mirror blinked slowly, one, two, three times. "How kind of your Mom, Dave. What time are the tickets for?"

Dave looked at his watch. "Five. That gives us two hours. I know we wanted to go eat at that place on the river, but Nalia's only here for a

brief time." He moved to the closet and started pulling coats out with one hand and piling them on a now chortling Sam. "We can grab a quick bite somewhere near the museum. We should leave now in case there's trouble getting a cab." He spun around and frowned. "But wait, we can't leave without our little buddy! Where's Sam?"

"Here! I'm here Daddy!" yelled Sam, pushing the coats off himself with delight.

"Sammy! There you are." Dave put his son down and pointed towards a small pair of sneakers in the closet. "Okay, let's get our shoes on."

Sam and Dave busied themselves with getting ready to go out. Cheryl put on her coat, and slipped her hand into the pocket, feeling the reassuring curves of the figurine.

The museum was packed. Throngs of people moved through marble hallways, their footsteps echoing, murmurs punctuated by an occasional burst of laughter. Cheryl kept an eye on Sam as he trotted ahead of her, clinging fiercely to his beloved Grannie's hand. They were finally here.

She hadn't planned on seeing the Nalia exhibit. The image had been enough, holding her grief carefully, calmly over the last few months had been more than enough. The figurine, so small and fragile, had felt like a gift from unseen gods. Now, moving closer, pulled on relentlessly by the forward motion of those she loved, Cheryl felt the hallway narrow and stretch before her. She followed as her family turned a corner. There was a doorway ahead. Light blazed from it. She went in.

Bubbles filled the room, jetted

out by a machine carefully camouflaged in the corner. Sam ran around wildly for a moment, batting at bubbles before Dave reined him in. Nalia was in a glass case in the center of the room. She stood as tall as a hand, poised on one foot, the other peeking out from her pink dress. Her face was lifted, the small frame of the bubble maker in front of her tiny lips as they blew. Frozen bubbles streamed out, connected, translucent, transparent, ethereal. Cheryl circled the display, her hand in her pocket, her eyes cataloged details.

Was that a hint of blue under Nalia's eyes? A slight tiredness in the lift of her hand? Cheryl felt a jolt run through her. Was this little girl alright? Was she weary of being trapped in the glass case? Was she hiding some flaw, some weakness? Was there something wrong with her? Something distorted, decaying? Something mortal?

Tears came to Cheryl's eyes and flowed down her face. Grief bubbled up in her, bursting, and a sob escaped, rough and ragged.

A sound to the right rang in her ears. She turned and saw her. Dressed in a pink frock, running wildly, a little girl was blowing bubbles, one hand clutching a neon yellow bottle of bubble soap.

A woman skillfully scooped up the girl, nabbing the container before it spilled. "Alright now, wildling, let's cool our jets for a bit."

"Mommy! Look! It's me!" The little girl squirmed in her mother's arms, twisting around to point at Nalia.

"So it is," replied her mother calmly. "I wonder what she's thinking?"

"She's thinking of cake," said the little girl firmly.

“Mommy!” said a voice to her left. Sam ran into her leg, throwing his arms around it and beaming up at her. “You should catch bubbles! They’re everywhere and Daddy says we can make them at home.” He grabbed her hand and led her over to the bubble machine. She bent down to look at the machine as he pointed out the different parts and

explained his own version of what each bit did. She nodded and made encouraging comments. Sam spotted his father and ran to him, tugged his hand and led him towards Nalia’s display case.

Cheryl reached in her pocket and took out the little figurine. This close to Nalia in her glass prison, she could see the crudity of her

talisman. It approximated the real thing.

Recognizable, but not even close to the grace and beauty of the original. She placed the small statue on top of the bubble machine and stood up slowly. Her eyes scanned the room until she spotted the little girl in her pink dress, then she quietly, fiercely, looked for her son.

Though she's been writing non-fiction for decades, **Pamela Zero** finally ventured into creating science fiction in 2019. Her trilogy, the *Visitor Series*, follows the lives of people pulled hundreds of thousands of years into the future. She is a member of several writing groups, has won several awards for her short stories, and is currently editing the second novel, “Ose,” in the *Visitor Series*. Pamela is based in Northern California, and spends her time writing and teaching. Now and then she travels, gardens, cooks, and genuinely tries. Her focus is on accurately bridging the gap between vision and reality.

Declan D. Edge

Treasure of All Ages

Orfeo stood at the ruins and waited. The See'r had spoken of many a test, a trial, that would either permit his entry or slay him. Clouds swirled above like seabound leviathans in an oceanic sky, and the tall grass shook gently with the early autumn breeze. An arm bedecked in a tasseled leather pauldron and bronze vambrace hung across his person, its calloused hand resting upon the hilt of his sheathed sword.

Orfeo waited, and the sun dimmed, and the moon began to glow, and the sky deepened in its hue, dazzled by sparkling stars. His eyes dimmed, and shoulders sagged, and despite the burning in his calves, he dared not sit. In time, the lands were black under the new, nocturnal sky, and Orfeo found himself simultaneously focusing his gaze while flitting it in every possible direction. His head began to throb, and the maintenance of this guard became taxing.

All he ever desired lay in the temple ahead. His grandest of dreams would be granted if he were to find the fated room. Many came, fewer went, said the See'r. But none who found the room - and passed its tests - left without this promise fulfilled. He thought of his wife, his children, their cottage and their meager, pastoral world. Never again, would they need to toil in the

fields and amongst the livestock to survive. They would be kings and queens, all.

He could almost feel the warmth of the hearth back home, and smell the pleasant smoke of their fire burning. Fire, that was what he needed now. Falling to his knees, he began tearing up the tall grass as he hunted for something to serve as a torch. Probing fingers passed upon something long and firm amidst the tufts of abundant, firm foliage, he set about striking sparks from his greave with a stone where he knelt. As embers danced, he bellowed life into the flame deep from his barrel-chest, and soon wielded light and warmth in his very grasp.

Gasping, he nearly tossed the burning thing across the field as the flame illuminated the handle's true form. Long and firm, it was. But any stick, it was not. A bone was what he held, and as a chill shot up his

“Many came, fewer went, said the See'r.”

broad back, it seemed to be about the same width and length of a man's thigh bone. Gaze cast down, his eyes fell upon the grave benefactor. In the grass beneath his feet lay the skeleton of a man

bedecked in withered pelts and shoddy patches of bog iron, once bound in ropes that likely began disintegrating long ago. Stepping away, he saw another, and another, each bearing marks of a different time and place. His worst fears were confirmed - this was the site of the first test, indeed. But what, Orfeo contemplated, slew this lot across their manifold generations? In that instant, realization struck of his naked vulnerability in that field, and against all reason, he bounded through the ruins and towards the temple, up its steps.

The monolithic structure bore an icy, pale glow in Orfeo's torchlight. From marble it was hewn, each grand stone cut with precision and moved into place with impossible strength. Its doorway was the height of five men, perfectly rectangular, and as wide as a draft horse is long. The darkness within seemed deeper and denser than the darkness without, and Orfeo began searching for signs of what slew the men in the field. Demanding to know if his foe came from within the temple's abyssal depths, weary eyes scanned for chipped stone, bestial claw-marks, anything about the passage to betray signs of powerful, malicious life. After a moment of searching, Orfeo felt frightfully vindicated, but he soon realized that the marks found were neat, uniform, and carved by human

hands.

While the text's form seemed archaic, its language seemed nigh identical to Orfeo's own. Soon, revelation dawned upon the explorer - he knew exactly where this familiarity had crept up from. These were the very words that the See'r had so cryptically forewarned Orfeo with as he set out on his quest. And they read,

Fear not the saber-toothed predator, nor the axe-hurling vandal. Fear only that which cannot be seen, heard, felt, nor slain.

The adage made just as much sense then as it did upon its first recital. Surely, it meant some primeval sorcery. Orfeo was a simple man, and had led a simple life: a farmer as a boy, a soldier as a youth, then a farmer again, rearing the family that he loved so dearly on the very homestead of his childhood. He cared not for riddles, preferring the certainty of the tool in his hand, be it plow or sword, and the love of kin in his heart. For his family, he decided, he would press on.

With each cautious step aided by the light of the one who came before him, Orfeo pressed further into the temple. The passage deepened, its structure, shape, and size unchanging as it stretched on endlessly. The only alteration was the darkness that encroached upon him, growing vaster and more tangible as he strayed further from the moon's light, and as his torch dimmed steadily. In time, the flame flickered and faded to embers, returning to the state in which Orfeo had first found it.

Stopping, he thanked the spirit of whomever first lived and walked by this bone, and gently set it upon

the ground. He drew his bronze blade and held it before him in one hand, using the other to grope the nearest wall as he ventured on.

Time passed, and Orfeo's thoughts ebbed and flowed from his family to the adage, back and forth with each footfall. Soon, he no longer recognized the strength fading from his limbs, or the moments spent within the temple, and he hardly realized that his hand no longer made contact with any wall as he passed into a vast, borderless chamber. But by now, Orfeo's eyes had adjusted to the darkness as well as they ever would, and vague shapes could be made out in subtly varying shades of black. While he could only assume the room bore walls and a ceiling in some sightless realms of this void, numerous slouched, slumped, and laying shapes could be detected about the floor. The only way through was forward, he determined, and continued straight until his sandaled foot struck something solid, sending it lightly clattering a few paces before him. Whatever it was, it sloshed as if it contained some fluid within, and new hope for light and vision flooded his spirits. Clambering about the ground once more, he took it in his grasp and brought it close to his face, feeling it as if his fingers were eyes.

It was metal in the shape of a small pot, and seemed to have a modest opening that could hinge open and shut. From a small basin within, the smell of oil and coal floated forth, and he excitedly began striking his blade against armor to shower the thing in sparks. Ecstatically, it lit, and as orange light sprung from the handheld

container's small window, Orfeo stifled a terrible cry.

Like the field, there were bodies all about him. Each took a different size and shape, and lay bundled in their own assortments of attire and tools which betrayed a variety of cultures and eras, many seeming utterly alien to Orfeo. They were skeletons, all, and Orfeo's mind raced to puzzle over how recently this temple had received its last guest. Time and time again, the See'r had emphasized the temple's mysterious and grave danger, and most learned or travelled men whom Orfeo had met at least knew rumors of the very place. Naught but dust blanketed these bodies

“Fear only that which cannot be seen, heard, felt, nor slain.”

and their belongings, such a dust that only time could conjure.

Orfeo no longer thought of his family, or the See'r, or some terrible beast or volatile magicks; all he felt was the primal, frenzied fear of something being terribly wrong, and terribly beyond his control. Orfeo bolted like a cornered animal towards, where he prayed there may be, the chamber's end, and with every passing moment his joints tightened, muscles strained, bones ached, and lungs shriveled. Seeing a vast wall ahead, the next sight of the next passage redoubled his resolve, and as Orfeo swore his body was failing him in this cursed chamber, he grew closer to what he hoped would grant either victory or a swift end.

Guided by lamplight, Orfeo

leaned against the mighty walls of the next hall. Supernaturally exhausted and sore, he hung his head in wheezing agony. He could hardly stand. His palm rested heavily upon the pommel of his weapon as its sharp point was driven into hard marble. But something shining upon the ground caught his eye, and sparked his hopes. A coin, it was, of solid gold. Raising bleak eyes from their cavernous sockets, it seemed as if a trail of these tiny treasures extended a royal invitation. And as he stumbled towards his bounty, grinning stupidly and laughing, the light of flame caught and flashed upon some colossus of shining wealth, and Orfeo soon found himself suffocating in disbelief at the hoard of treasure before him.

Heaped high were piles of coins of every make and value, goblets of silver and gold overflowing invisibly with the promise of their value, crowns of emperors and god-kings

embedded with rubies, drenched crimson in the life blood of nations and epochs. Pearls, chests, gemstones, and numerous others invited him freely to erect himself as the ultimate ruler of all mankind from hereon to the sun's last setting. But only one item was capable of catching him in its grip, refusing to release its victim: a modest mirror lined by a splintered, stained wooden frame, standing only a head taller than Orfeo himself.

Orfeo was loath to approach. Of all these dazzling riches, this dusty, foggy portal asserted itself as his master, and he had no choice but to approach. Dropping his sword to wipe the dust clean, Orfeo felt small, weak, and withered. Gazing upon himself, he saw something new. Haggard eyes met his, shrouded by greying hair that flowed down from a rough scalp. Deep lines creased his features, once-clear skin wrinkled and

folded, while the scars of past triumphs had been long healed, bidding farewell to years never to be reclaimed.

In an instant, he was made aware of what the See'r's warning had alluded to. Tears welled and his throat tightened. Falling to his knees, he thought again to his family, and felt the vice grip of regret and longing upon his shoulders. He had felt this terrible touch before, first when he struck out in search of the temple. Only then, he had believed this invisible hand was dragging him forth. Now he knew; it was pleading with him to stay.

He left the temple no richer than when he had set out on this journey, and now walked once more through the tall grass. His wish having been granted, Orfeo left the temple and went home to the greatest treasure he could ever behold.

Kaavya Sivakumar

The Watchman

For the first time in three years, the temple was blessed with a Kumbhabhishekam, a consecration ritual performed in Hindu temples to honor and synergize the deities housed in the temple. The turnout was impressive. I overheard one of the contracted caterers for the breakfast feast, worriedly muttering to himself that the attendance was well beyond what his team had prepared for. I, for one, as the watchman of the temple, was unbothered.

It seems like a redundant job, doesn't it? After all, why would a temple, the house of gods, need the protection of a mere watchman? The truth is, my job is pretty redundant. I don't do much protecting. My duties mainly involve opening the gate at 6:00 am, watering the plants in the Temple Garden, feeding the stray cats, dogs and squirrels that frequent the garden, cutting Jasmine garlands into smaller pieces to hand out to the women devotees, ensuring people do not absent-mindedly walk into the Temple without removing their footwear (trust me, this happens more often than you think), and closing the gate at 10:00 pm. And I have been doing this every day for the last sixty-seven years. As monotonous as it may seem, I liked

my job.

You see, the temple is a safe space in the most contradictory sense of the phrase. It is a place where people willingly expose their most personal vulnerabilities while being judged by the toughest critic in the universe, God. This paradox nurtures a bountiful harvest for me, a perennial observer.

Today was a day for such observation.

I sat cross-legged in my usual spot near the entrance of the temple, and squinted at the buzzing crowd gathering in the garden.

The women adorned grand silk saris with a myriad of patterns and necklines. While every color under the sun was represented, the yellows and reds dominated, just as I had predicted. I, however, counted an odd number of women, visibly belonging to the younger demographic, wearing a peculiar design: Lilac-silks with boat-neck sleeves. This seemed to be the recent trend in sari fashion. How fascinating. On the opposite end of my fascination spectrum were the men. Men with their white shirts with white Veshtis. Nothing particularly interesting, although I did notice one father lift his toddler's shirt to adjust the Velcro belt in his veshti. How the world has evolved. We may not have flying cars in the 20th century, but we do

have Velcro veshtis.

As the sun grew stronger, the crowd ambled towards the humble roofed sanctuary of the Gods, and the rituals commenced. The two chief priests sat down, cross-legged in front of God Vishnu, and recited devotional mantras and hymns in Sanskrit at a rhythmic pace, with the crowd assembling behind them.

The men and women spontaneously split into two queues on either side of the priests, with the men on the left and the women on the right. It was now time to pray. Hundreds of eager hopefuls closed their eyes, raising their hands, palms closed, towards their bowed heads. Their prayers seemed to make the trees sway and the birds hum. It was raining.

“ Today was a day for such observation. ”

I was vengeful. God had not answered any of my prayers, despite my loyal service. In my twenties, I had asked for a respectable salary. In my thirties, I had asked for a sweet wife. In my forties, I had asked for a fogless eyesight. In my fifties, I had asked for a smooth digestion. In my sixties, I had asked for a dreamless

sleep. Yesterday, I asked for a painless death. None of my wishes had been granted.

What was the point of prayer without quid pro quo.

Palpable Rage and unbearable sadness took over my senses as I pointed the scissors I had used to cut the Jasmine garlands

towards my stomach.

Lightning struck me before I could hurt myself. It was not a painless death.

Kaavya Sivakumar is an aspiring writer and literary enthusiast from Chennai, India. She lived the corporate life in the audit field for three years after college, before deciding to pursue a more fulfilling dream in the arts. When she's not reading, she's likely practicing her Italian or watching reruns of Parks and Recreation.

Uduak-Abasi Ekong

The Mirror Does Not Lie

My husband says I'm the most beautiful woman in the world, but he's only human and humans lie. I know he doesn't mean to. I doubt he even knows he is. Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder, after all. But, I know it's a lie, and it's only a matter of time before whatever scales of love blinds him falls off and he beholds another.

He's been consistent though, I'll give him that. Every morning, for the past five years, before we lazily roll off our king-sized bed, dash into the bathroom to shower, eat whatever he's made for breakfast (usually something with egg sauce because that's my favourite), and plunge ourselves into the Lagos traffic, he ensures it's the first words that roll off his tongue. Even two years ago, when he had migraines so bad, it was difficult to speak without wincing, he still made sure his lies were the first words I heard everyday.

Today, as I lie next to him, my hairnet fallen halfway through my head, revealing the two-month old cornrow on my head, my cheeks

*“Like a vampire
hiding from
the sun,”*

filled with white lines of dried

saliva, and my eyes, so crusty I have to pry them open with my fingers, I wonder if I should tell him the lies have to stop when he wakes.

“My beautiful baby,” I hear him say. I turn around and smile. He smiles back and cusps my face into his palm.

“My handsome baby,” I say, kissing his palm. That is not a lie. When we first met, on a flight bound for Uyo, I wished for a moment that the flight would never land so I'd be seated beside this handsome stranger forever. His jaw, so sharp it could cut through steel. His lips, pink as a tongue. His eyes, bright as a star. I knew then that I wanted to look at him for the rest of my life.

He smiles and asks what I'd like for breakfast. I should say something easy like plantain and egg sauce or bread and egg sauce.

“Fisherman soup,”

“Alright, my love,” he says, kissing my hand and I feel my heart sink. He'd cook anything to make me happy. He's perfect. If only he'd stop with the lies.

As the sun pierces through the window in our kitchen, casting a golden yellow reflection on the marble tops, I watch him stir the fisherman soup with a plastic ladle. Everything in this house is plastic, devoid of reflections. As I watch him pause mid-stir to tap the ladle

into his palm for a taste, I wonder if his lies would be easier to hear if I prepped by lying to myself too. Probably not. I'd already tried something similar when I was in university.

In 300 level, I'd returned from class one day to find a wall-length mirror in between my bed and my roommate's. It reminded me of the one in my mother's room. The one she made my siblings and I stand in front of to access our outfits whenever we were stepping out. The one I'd begged her to take away but she refused.

Like a vampire hiding from the sun, I'd ducked to the side while glaring at my roommate.

“What is this? I thought we agreed that we'll not put mirror in this room,”

“Calm down, it doesn't bite,” she'd said. She was sitting on a blue plastic chair in front of it, her lips pursed, and a makeup box open beside her.

“I don't want a mirror in this room. This is my room too,” I'd said, my eyes closed as I held the wall for balance while making my way to my bed in the corner.

“Why are you doing as if it will burn you?” I'd heard her laugh.

Of course she'd laughed. When she looked in the mirror, the person looking back was a tall, slender girl with bright brown eyes, cheekbones

that accentuated her face, lips that pursed with each word she spoke, skin that glowed in the sun, and ears that looked nothing like spoons. Nothing like mine. Of course she'd have no trouble walking past it everyday. If anything, that mirror would be a

“ Bless him, but I fear I'll never get it. ”

daily reminder that her life would be perfect. That people would favour her wherever she went. That if all else failed, she could easily venture into acting or modelling. That she would not have to become a medical doctor to show the earth she was worthy of living on it even if she didn't look the part.

I'd tried to be like her. After days of stubbing my toe into every corner while walking round the room with my eyes closed, I'd woken up one night and looked straight into the mirror. Though I had not met my husband yet, for a moment, I'd seen what he would come to describe. My eyes, which he says sparkles even in the dark. My nose, which he calls a 'cute little face button.' My lips, which he says are a 'well-defined cupid's bow.' And then, I'd seen my ears. The one my sisters used to bring plates of food to and pretend to eat from. The one that made my mother ask why 'ear jobs' weren't as popular as nose jobs. The one my boyfriend in university had clung onto as the reason for our breakup.

“Pity our unborn children,” he'd said. “I don't want them to go through life with this type of ears,”

he'd added, his eyes droopy like he truly felt sorry.

They say your ears give balance to your face, so what's your face with spoon ears, if not unbalanced? I'd punched the mirror till I was bleeding and though my roommate awoke, her jaw practically on the floor as she stared at me, she never replaced that mirror.

“What's on your mind?” My husband asks, pouring Garri into the pot of boiling water beside the soup.

“Nothing,”

“Tell me, my love,” he says, walking down to the chair by the kitchen counter where I sit.

“Nothing's wrong,” I say. He looks at me and leans forward to kiss my forehead lightly.

“Alright,” he says. He turns back and heads to the cooker and I sigh softly.

“If you're not too busy with drawing today, can I do your ears?” He asks, turning the Garri with a wooden spatula. My husband has taken to sculpting different parts of my body. When we first met, he used to take pictures of me - the first one being when our flight landed, saying he did not want to forget the person he'd had the best conversation with (all we did was talk about how we'd fare as different animals. I was more likely to make it as a bird and him, a worm).

He used to take a lot of pictures of me when we first started dating a few weeks later. They were always candid, when I was eating, when I was asleep, when I was in my scrubs, etc. He'd show me the pictures, lying about how beautiful I looked in them while I'd worry about anyone ever seeing them.

He'd used one, a picture of me laughing after destroying him at Scrabble, as his wallpaper. For a week, all I could think about was how many people - strangers, friends, family, everyone, and anyone, would see it. They'd see how wide my mouth looked in it, how much of my teeth was on display, how there was a bit of saliva at the edge of my lips, and of course, how my ears covered half of the picture. I'd told him to stop taking pictures of me after that, and though he was sad about it for a few months, he came home one Saturday with a wide grin.

“I found a sculpting class in Lekki and I'll be going there twice a week. I want to be able to recreate your beauty,”

Today, there are pieces of my body all around his nightstand. My knees, my arms, my nose, my lips, and now, my ears. I think he's trying to make a point about how individually, the parts are beautiful. Bless him, but I fear I'll never get it.

“I wish you could see yourself through my eyes,” he'd said while sculpting his first piece. My nose. I'd wished I could too. How nice it would be if technology could invent a way for me to go inside his head and see what he sees. I'd wake up as happy as he does everyday. But, until then.

“I'd like that,” I say as he places my plate of food in front of me. And truly, I would. It makes him happy to sculpt. It makes me happy to see him happy. He smiles and so do I.

I'm seated on a stepstool in what used to be his study room, but is now his sculpting room, burping Garri and fisherman soup as my husband moulds the clay. A few years ago, before I met him, I was

sitting in an art lounge in Ikoyi while strangers drew my ears. It was a bid to 'love myself,' as my roommate had advised after I broke her ₦15,000 mirror (she talked about it all through the semester till we both switched rooms, perhaps in a bid to get me to refund her). I'd tried to tell her I loved myself plenty. I do not put my hand inside fire and I do not walk off cliffs. I love myself. I can love myself and still think myself is ugly.

"You're so beautiful, even when

something is bothering you and you refuse to tell me," my husband says, looking at me, his hands filled with clay.

"I'm not that beautiful," I say, looking down.

"Says who?"

I say nothing. He drops the clay on the wooden table in front of him and walks to me.

"You can't always believe a mirror, my love" he says, taking my hand into his. "Sometimes, it makes you see only what you want to see," he

adds, holding my now clay-covered hand. What does that even mean? I have no idea but I smile. He kisses my forehead and heads back to the table. I smile as I turn sideways, tucking my braids behind and showing him my ear so he can sculpt what he claims will be his masterpiece. Maybe one day, I'll see what he sees, and smile the way he does when he looks at me. But for now, I know the truth and so do mirrors everywhere.

Uduak-Abasi Ekong is a Manchester-based Nigerian writer. Her short stories have appeared in Brittle Paper, Arts Lounge Magazine, and Iko Africa. Her novel-in-progress was shortlisted for the 2024 Merky New Writers' Prize and her short story was longlisted for the Mslexia 2024 Short Story Prize. She is an alumna of the Faber Academy 'Getting Started: Beginner's Fiction' course. She is also a reader for *Cosmic Daffodils Magazine*.

Máté Mrsan

Finding Myself

I was looking outside at the garden, observing the last remnants of previously fallen snow clinging onto one another in order to shield themselves from the sun's murderous rays. Hoping that their friends will shield them from it and that they would outlive them. I would have felt sorry for the melting flakes if it weren't for their arrogance only a month or so ago. When they fell upon my house and garden, trying to reshape my domain to their whims.

Yet still, the odd feeling of satisfaction from seeing my former conquerors in such a state quickly faded as I realised something crucial.

I wasn't out in the garden.

Staring at the garden from different angles and windows yielded the same tragic result, I was nowhere to be found. But how come? My mother, dressed in her finest suit of armor, had politely asked me to replant all the trees to the left just like she does every saturday. I was no disrespectful scamp, I did as I was told, perhaps taking a bit more time than required but still the work was always done. So where could I have run off to? Perhaps some kind of monster came and scared me away? Did I walk out the wrong door on my way to the garden and got lost? Perhaps some vile ruffian mistook

me as a person of means and scurried away with me restrained in their devious wheelbarrow?

There were too many possibilities of raw horribleness that could have

“Could this man be me? I wasn't sure.”

befallen me! After all, I was such a fragile little thing, unlike me. So I decided to find myself out there in the world. Wherever I could be.

I donned a jacket and with a thunderous but polite roar I opened the front door and ran out into the world. Determined to find myself. Yet after only a few steps I had already reached my first conundrum, for there were two ways to go upon the road in front of my home, one reaching left and the other heading right. Ridiculous really, I voted against implementing these so-called *directions*, they just complicate things for no reason! Back in the day you just walked outside and went on your way! But now you have to worry about turning right or turning left, about going north or going south.

It was too late to change this but it's never too late to complain! Still I had to choose and so I have chosen with the help of the only reliable source, luck. I closed my eyes and

spun around and around, until I was too dizzy to stand and in whatever direction I fell would become the one I would walk. And so I spun and so I walked.

There was a man in my way, he was sitting on a metal bench made out of charred metal rings soldered together. Could this man be me? I wasn't sure. Still it would be worth it to just ask wouldn't it? I bravely approached the man and in doing so got a better look at him. He was hunched over, in one hand holding a worn plastic cube divided into smaller even more colorful cubes. In the other was a tiny brush made up of a singular bristle no bigger than a cat's whisker. He carefully lowered his tiny brush into a large metal bucket by his feet which was filled with viscous purple paint. Once his brush soaked up as much paint as it could, which was just enough for a single stroke, he started painting over the original color of the small cubes. I could not help but inquire what the purpose was behind this activity.

“Hi there!”

I said with an enthusiastic tone hopefully establishing a similar feel for the whole conversation yet my hopes were dashed against the wind as the man responded with a surly grunt.

“So... can I ask why you are doing this?”

The man looked up at me, briefly

pausing his repetitive task.

“Purple tastes better.”

What an outrageous statement! Green was clearly the superior flavour! It was clear that this man was not me for I would never have made such a blunder in regards to flavour! Still he might know where I went.

“I... see, did you perhaps see where I went? It is rather embarrassing but I seem to have lost myself.”

“Ah.”

Said the man, once again pausing his taxing work.

“There is no need to panic. It happens to everyone.”

“It does?”

I asked more out of politeness as clearly the man was out of it due to being outside too long. His claim seemed so ridiculous! After all, if everyone lost themselves left and right how could anything get done?

“It does. More often than you think. Sometimes I wonder if I spent more time looking for myself than actually looking at myself. Don't worry about it.”

The man said, a soft smile stretching across his wrinkly face. I did not respond, not knowing whether to scream in horror of this claim or laugh at its sheer absurdity, I decided to simply not react.

“You will find yourself again. I tend to come back to me whenever I sit down and just do something. If I exert myself I tend to scare me away. Perhaps you shouldn't search yourself either? Maybe you already saw yourself, you just didn't recognize them.”

At this I became rather miff. Who is this man to claim I would not

recognize myself? What does he mean that I would change? I am me. Always was always will be. I simply turned around and started walking, not even acknowledging this scandalous statement with a response though I couldn't help but murmur to myself.

“Not recognize myself!? What is this utter insanity!”

Before I could unleash my righteous indignation at an unfortunate rock or similar road debris, a song began to flow from nearby forest. Could this be me? Perhaps, perhaps now. Either way it would serve as distraction from the ramblings of that foolish man.

Pressing through the various bushes and sticks was difficult, I did not want to hurt any of them yet I

“ There is no need to panic. It happens to everyone. ”

must in order to get across. So I asked each one how their day was and I only stepped on those that responded rudely.

Once done I arrived at a small clearing far from the main path slithering throughout the forest. A huge willow tree dominated the clearing. Its long flowing branches touched the ground, forming a leafy bubble around it. From within that bubble was the song and the singer's silhouette dancing with graceful motions. With an unceremonious step I strode through the cage of branches to look at what hopefully was myself.

The singer was a woman, with long flowing golden hair and emerald eyes. Her skin covered in

small metal dots and rings, her dress was an ever shifting plane of marigolds that reached to her knee. She never stopped dancing, even when she saw me. I was waiting for her to stop singing only to realize that she did, but not fully. She simply switched out her lyrics in order to address me while keeping the same rhythm.

“Why hello there traveler! What brings you here, you do not appear to be my fiddler?”

“No, I'm not Miss. I am sorry to disturb you but I...”

My sudden silence managed to surprise the lady as her movements became slightly wobbly for half a moment. Part of me wasn't sure if I should tell her the truth. After all.. what if that crazy man was right? What if she too lost herself? What if instead of finding myself.. She could become me? I knew she wasn't me, she was radiating this raw force of.. Confidence? Perfection? Either way she was everything I wasn't. But what if I could convince her that she was me? Could I turn myself into her?

“It might be a strange thing to ask... But have you perhaps, lost yourself?”

“No? If I would, believe me, I would know!”

Before I could respond she started to twirl faster and faster until she flew away. Leaving me alone underneath the willow. I stood there for a minute, watching her until I couldn't see her anymore.

Would it even matter if I found myself? There was no chance I would be as remarkable as her. Maybe it would be better if I never found it? If I could only think about what I could be... then that way at

least I could think myself remarkable. Deep in thought I walked deeper into the forest until I found myself by a creek. I decided to sit by it, hoping that this new environment would spark a genius idea that could help my conundrum about myself.

As I did so, to my surprise I saw someone in the creek! At first I was concerned that they might be drowning but they seemed fine. No, not fine. There was something behind their eyes, something sad. I leaned in a bit closer and so did

they, I managed to get a closer look at them as they no doubt did the same to me. They were nowhere as graceful or confident as the lady. Their skin was not adorned, their eyes not radiating that sheer joy and competence. If I was someone rude I might even have called them ugly.

But was that a bad thing? That they weren't someone else? Did the man care what other people were when he was painting? Did my mother care who it was that would plant all the trees to the left? Did I

care who was outside when I looked through the window?

I reached out towards the stranger only to pull my hand away from the cold water. I let out a soft chuckle at my squeamishness and returned my attention to the stranger, only then did I realise, it did not matter what they looked, it did not matter what they failed to become as long as they smiled just a few times it would be alright. I knew that because I knew that smile very well, it was mine.

Máté Mrgan is a man obsessed by stories. All the various ways they can be told and experienced. I hope that I can share my own stories and experience the stories of others!

Sara Siddiqui Chansarkar

Binary Stars

It's my turn to peek through the eyepiece of the giant telescope at the Lowell Observatory.

"Ma, do you see the binary stars?" Vivek asks. "I could see them clearly."

With my right eye on the lens, I observe two silver balls shining close to each other in a nebulous haze, one visibly brighter than the other.

"They appear as one without a telescope, but in reality, they are two objects moving in separate orbits." My son states facts he's learned at the School Science Olympiad.

Although he's speaking science, my mind drifts and the skin on my neck turns cold. I zip my sweater all the way up to my chin. My husband Samir didn't accompany us on this spring break trip—he had a deadline at work. Last winter, I didn't join him and Vivek on the skiing trip.

Samir and I are traversing our orbits. Our differences—he's movies, I'm books; he's steak, I'm

"My son's found the raw nerve throbbing in my neck."

salad; he's malls, I'm parks—that we appreciated and made accommodations for, have over the

years expanded into light years. We keep it quiet for Vivek—not to disrupt his APs and SATs—but, at times, I want to scream out aloud, pound the pillows, even punch the drywall.

Later, at the gift shop, Vivek looks at a mini telescope while I read up on binary stars in a book. I'm intrigued that this star system is my marriage explained in the parlance of space.

On the way to our hotel, Vivek is excited and voluble. "Ma, did you notice the difference in the binary stars? The brighter one's called the primary, the dimmer one, the secondary."

"Yes," I say, focusing my eyes on the road. A fog has descended, making visibility poor. "But I don't like how the astronomers have smeared their earthly biases into space. The primary, always the head of household—the one who brings in more money."

"I know what you mean," Vivek says.

Out of the corner of my eye, I notice the faint stubble on my son's chin, his jawline squaring and maturing a man's, imagine his mind and outlook taking shape.

He digs into his pocket and removes a magnet. "I bought this for Pa. Maybe he'll like it."

"It's good," I reply.

"Ma, do you know the binary stars

are also classified based on their Roche lobes," Vivek starts talking again.

"Oh, I didn't know that," I said. "I thought lobes belonged to brains."

"Stars have lobes too. Their own gravitational areas. In contact binaries, the individual stars spill out of their Roche lobes and shape each other." Vivek pauses, then continues after a breath. "Then there are detached binaries where the stars stay within their gravitational areas and evolve separately while being together."

There. My son's found the raw nerve throbbing in my neck. I gulp, then try to diffuse the situation. Maybe, he wasn't alluding to his parents. I sprinkle in some levity.

"Can their behavior be explained through quantum physics, Professor Vivek?"

"No, Ma. This is pure old gravitational force." He chuckles before his tone turns pensive. "I hope that's enough to keep the stars together."

My heart splits and my eyelashes itch.

"Yes, that's more than enough," I say, clearing my throat to gain control over my emotions, recalling the facts I read in the gift shop. "Besides, it's the barycenter that will hold them together forever. The center, you know, around which the binary stars orbit."

Essay

Brandi-Ann Uyemura

The Great Divide

1. Mom and I fought almost daily as children. It was routine.
2. As I got older, I began to listen more. I internalized the hurtful things. Mom said I was, “mature,” now because I didn’t fight back.
3. I had children in my late thirties and then I became too busy to fight. But I could feel the crack start. It was a difficult period foreshadowing greater struggle. There was never enough time to share a meaningful word. Instead of understanding, there was underlying resentment. On my part it was for all the unnecessary suffering I felt I had to endure as a new mother without a mother’s help and support.
4. When I became forty, something was unleashed in me. A lion that couldn’t be tamed. Time was disintegrating and couldn’t be taken back. But instead of coming together in this fresh air of change, there was a deep growing divide.
5. Now there were broken shards of glass everywhere. We could not talk without bleeding from it. If I chose to stay at home with my kids, I was making a statement of how she chose to work and not spend time with me. If I didn’t give them sweets, I was passively aggressively saying she was wrong to give it to me. Breastfeeding wasn’t something she chose either while I went from place to place trying desperately to nurse my son.
6. And although I told her directly that my decisions were my own, if I was going to be honest, I did question her decisions.
7. As I grew into a woman who knew the world, as I grew into a mother who knew how my decisions impacted my kids, I couldn’t understand hers.
8. I learned to skirt the big issues, but inside it bothered me. I wanted to know whose funeral she was going to and how her dog was doing. But more importantly, I wanted to know why we hardly saw her and why in my lowest moments when the kids had the flu and we were desperately tired and hungry, she did not send even a text to ask how we were doing.
9. I had an image of a perfect mother daughter relationship on television and movies. I knew mothers who flew to help their daughter travel with their kids. And grandmothers who didn’t just pick up their kids from school every day, but gave them a bath and fed them dinner. It wasn’t just that I needed help, which I did. But I needed a mother. Someone you can call if something is bothering you or a few hours to decompress from your kids.
10. I imagined getting our nails done or having a cup of coffee. Maybe my mom had dreams of a different kind of daughter too—one that was less judgmental, who had a traditional full-time job and loved to go shopping.
11. As she got older and frailer, I started to realize that the dream I had of a mother and daughter relationship would never happen. We were different people. Maybe that type of relationship was like a fairytale, nonexistent.
12. I was running out of time, and I needed more time. I needed time to grieve the mother I had. And figure out what could be redeemed.
13. I never had a daughter. In retrospect, it was likely a blessing, but it also made my desire to remediate my relationship with my own mother, urgent. I’ll never have a chance to redo my mother-daughter relationship with a girl of my own. I have, but one mother and one opportunity to

“ Now there were broken shards of glass everywhere. ”

- make things right or at least as right as it can be.
14. Sometimes when I struggle with the snappy librarian or the condescending cashier, my husband works with me to build a story about their lives that sound like this: Maybe he was having a bad day. Maybe she doesn't like her job. Maybe she wants to be nice, but doesn't know how to be. So I do this building to understand my mom.
 15. It starts with her upbringing. Being raised in a plantation community with three older kids. They were poor and my grandparents were uneducated. She says she was spoiled. She said her relationship with her own mother was physically close, but not emotional.
 16. The scaffolding is painful for me. But I grow compassion for her inability to know how to communicate when her own mother was often critical. This has been a lifetime job. One therapist told me if the only thing I ever did was get through my own past, I would have accomplished a lot.
 17. It was a great feat.
 18. There comes a time in this process when I know I must mother myself, that not only is my mother or any mother for that matter, incapable of being the mother I need her to be, but that she won't always be there. That there will be a time when I'll want to call her and she physically won't be able to answer.
 19. It's not that I hadn't tried to reach out. We did the dinner thing, and the lunch thing. Recently, I held the lion back and listened as she lightly shared topics. After she finished her fish and I finished my fish tacos, she smiled. "This was nice," she said.
 20. It was an unsatisfying meal for me. The spicy taco unsettled in my stomach.
 21. No matter how hard I tried to stretch it, hold it in the palm of my hand, time eventually ran out. Cancer and the pandemic pushed the final grains of sand through the sieve. One morning I woke up and I was motherless.
 22. The transition was painful and like all transitions, it transformed me. The only regret was that I had to lose my mother to realize how wrong I had been. I thought my greatest life challenge was learning to get along with my mother so I could feel mothered. But I realized that to become the woman I needed to be, I had to stop holding out for a mother to heal me. I had to become the mother I always needed her to be.

Brandi-Ann Uyemura is a fifth generation Japanese American mom writer born and raised on the island of Oahu. Her essays have been published in *The Writer*, *Spirituality & Health*, *Literary Mama* and more. You can look out for her debut picture book, "I am a Bon Dancer," in summer of 2025 and read her book reviews at Brandi-AnnUyemura.com and her posts Hawaii's climate on The Inspiring Bee.

Poetry

Sam Aureli

Blueberries for All

I give thanks for the rows
of blueberry shrubs, tall as old
men, nodding by the shed,
remnants of a farm
no one claims anymore.

Every morning, turkeys strut in,
heads bowed, then suddenly
leaping, wings clumsy,
snatching the highest fruit.
Jays and robins dart behind,
sharp-eyed, quick-clawed,
stripping branches bare.

People ask how I fend them off.
As if I would.
As if I could.
I let them feast.
By dawn, the bushes bend again,
heavy with what's beyond owning.

Old stone walls murmur *mine*,
but birds don't listen.
Wild things take what they need,
as they always have.
I stand in their shadows,
palms open,
watching.

Sam Aureli is a design and construction professional from Italy, living in Boston, MA. He turned to poetry later in his journey, seeking refuge from the chaos of daily life. Sam looks forward to the weekend, watching birds feed in the back yard, finding inspiration in the quiet moments. His work has been accepted in *Atlanta Review*, *Amethyst Review*, *Loft Books*, *Coverstory Books*, *Rough Diamond Poetry*, *Prosetrics The Magazine*.

James Aitchison

Of the broken land

(in Australia)

Have you seen those ravaged towns
which failure stopped to drape,
where tin-roofed pubs still struggle
and the barmaid's skin's like crêpe?

Have you seen the sacred stockyards
falling sad into decay?
No profit there transacted
For many a long, long day.

Have you seen the names on gates
like an honour roll of time,
where mortgages turned sour,
and faith's their only crime?

The dairy lies in closure and
the railway's come and gone.
The old ones still are farming,
but the young have all moved on.

Too many towns have dared to dream
of new and better days.
But let me tell you, friend,
hope falls scarce in summer's haze.

James Aitchison is an Australian author and poet whose work has appeared in *Australian Poetry*, *Aesthetica* (UK), *Black Poppy Review*, *Scars*, *Poetry for Mental Health*, and the *Australian Children's Poetry* website.

Uchechukwu Onyedikam

Silent Whisper

She appeared unnoticed with
the moon in her breast pocket
and the stars as an entourage.
Given a chance to dream...
she contemplated mortality.
Such hearty warmth & tenderness.
She finds her beauty where celestial
body, and angels tread. She finds
freedom from the lost scream when
the jailer locked her away. Of the long
freedom path she had walked and her
sole covered with bruises. An unstoppable
hue arising from Noah's ark — of the long
revered Joan of Arc in sameness found
written in the sleeves of her sword
and the face of her shield. Freedom for her people sets her heart aflame — now and present, not
out of reach for today's offerings. Echoes of love unheard found in the depth of the ocean she
carries in her mouth. Her wrath is an instant message when she spit the truth.
She's out in the mountain practicing
her skills under the red-burning night skies
waiting for tomorrow's dawning, here on
the right side of the night. Over her prayers
to crown her glory with the task ahead, she
draws strength from the pictures of the
past flipping through her mind — through
bewildered eyes, she yelled to the void but
the response to her cry was an echo:
to the echo of the silence she poured libation to the future worthy of everything. Her thoughts...
scattered to the wind —
I am one with the silent whisper, she prayed

Christina Chin & Uchechukwu Onyedikam

The Breaking Point

*airy evening
the night gradually
blankets
the three siblings
fast asleep*

*darkness ends
with the morning glory
opening
a moonflower
closes*

*suffering with a smile
the distinct music
of the city boy
a tipping bowl
at his feet*

Uchechukwu Onyedikam, Poet. Photographer. Tutor.

Terence Young

When We Had Wings

We used to fall with grace,
angels deigning to kiss the earth,
throwing ourselves from the tops of sand dunes
at the quarry and tumbling to the bottom
where we would make the climb back up
just to fall again, for the humour of it,
the urge to lose control, test the laws of gravity,
balance, daring the gods to topple us
from our crude skateboards, our bicycles,
laughing when they did, our skin healing
at the speed of sleep, rising the next day
to climb the unclimbable trees,
leap from the lake's highest cliff into water
that received us as heroes, thumbing our noses
at those who wanted us upright
on a planet spinning at over a thousand miles per hour
in a universe spiralling towards the infinite,
our bones pliant as English yew, our bodies thin
as the spokes of a wheel, rolling along tumbling mats
toward leather-clad horses that vaulted us
into the air and the arms of our spotters,
never doubting someone would catch us,
nor caring, heedless of what lay ahead,
no matter the fear-mongers, the common-sense crowd,
the fragility that even then was working its way into our hearts,
how tentative we would become, installing handrails,
securing ladders, snapping our helmets into place,
fastening our seatbelts, as if what we hold dear
is something we can actually hold.

Terence Young lives on Vancouver Island. His most recent book is a collection of poems, *Smithereens* (Harbour Publishing, 2021).

Tanishq Kalra

A Faded Cover

He was an untouched book,
sitting silently on the shelf,
Waiting patiently to be read.
A magical world was trapped inside him,
if only they would take the time,
to see that unseen world.
But he was judged too soon,
by his faded cover.

Tanishq Kalra is an Indian writer who loves telling stories and writing poetry. He started writing in high school and recently published his poetry book, 'Collection of a Novice Wordsmith'. His stories and poems are simple and powerful, which connect with the readers on a deep level. When he's not writing, he enjoys talking to people and learning about their experiences, which inspires his work.

Roy N. Mason

Caffeine Kick

She'd always cup both hands around a warm tea mug
Bring it close as nose inhaled escaping steam
With respite depose it on a rolling island

Forgotten during completion of chores
Sweeping ceramic and wood floors
And items of joy
Reading, journaling, painting, or sketch
Dive deep into True Crime

Erratically remember
Shaken from another membrane
Akin to when an awakened cat
Inexplicably runs to another room
Or finding money in a winter coat

Bring the liquid to puckered lips
Set it down walk away
Declaring it'd gone cold

Roy N. Mason

Balance

Balance-
is the word I keep tripping over.
I find it everywhere today.
Reading an economics article,
a social science book,
I've encountered it in music outputs.

How do we find that sweet spot?
Everything balanced?
Can we, until it ain't?
How do we know it's too far,
until it is?
Only once a line is crossed.

Sliding scales,
shifts along a continuum.
Too much of anything
disrupts balance,
even good things.
Per Paracelsus, dose determines poison.

Striving to make each day count, **Roy N. Mason** documents his experiences, observations and lessons-learned in personal essays and poetry. In his free-time, Roy can be found trying to synchronize the clocks in his kitchen. Roy's work has been curated in several journals.

Sirjana Kaur

This is Not the First Small Death

This story always begins with a child: a window or a mirror, depending on how you go about it. Someone tells you about death when you are young and you cannot forget. You cannot help but measure things in absence. When you learn to speak, you listen for what it is that you have taken from yourself, and resolve that it is gone forever.

When you build your cardboard house and make your bed in it. When a tree falls in the forest.

There are erasures and spaces and curved corners. There is ripped paper on the floor of the dollhouse and the make believe bicycle rolling through the Pretend Life, meant to take you anywhere but here. The further you go from this self-bounded childhood the more of yourself you leave.

When the cardboard ceiling, soaked through, collapses in on itself. When there is a story, and, like the tree, no one hears it.

All these words look the same and mean different things. When you carry out the cardboard house, watch it cave in under the rain, count the things you still have left. Over and over. Call yourself a window or a mirror but always something real. Call yourself a dreamer but not how you once meant it. How much of yourself is left?

When this is not the first small death. When you knew it wasn't, from the start.

Sirjana Kaur is an Indian-American writer from Redmond, Washington. A 2024 National Student Poets Program Semifinalist, her work has been recognized by the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, Eunoia Review, and Hot Pot Magazine. She's a lover of crosswords, cappuccinos, and the em dash.

Vern Fein

Diamonds and Gold

As a naive grad student crawling toward my PHD during the turbulent 60's, I was torn between my desire to tell students about great writers and communicate my distress over the Vietnam war.

Young and unattached,
I noticed young women like Emmeline,
in my class as they chitter-chattered
with friends about marriage and weddings.
And about rings.
After one class just before midterms
I focused on Emmaline's
fat engagement ring
and queried if she knew
where that stone came from.

A quizzical look appeared on her face:
"It came from Maxwell's Jeweler's.
My Uncle owns it." But I persisted:
"Where did the diamond come from?"
Taken aback, she said:
"I don't know. It came from where
all diamonds come from."

I wanted her to know about
South African mines,
mostly gold and diamonds
deep in the bowels of the earth
where these men slaved
for ten months a year,
in horrid conditions,
paid only a pittance, released
to their families two months a year,
trapped there for life times.
I harangued the poor girl
about the miners and their families
and their pain and suffering,
said it was immoral

to wear blood diamonds
and tarnished gold.
You are supporting
the mine owners, evil men
equivalent to slave owners.

Emmeline began to sob.
I apologized, realized
what I had triggered.
I don't think Emmeline took
her ring back and exchanged
it for a plain gold band.
I figured that young lady moved
past it and waltzed down the aisle
in her custom-made wedding dress.
Years later when I got married,
my wife and I exchanged
her first wedding ring
for a couple of simple gold bands
from the jeweler's "divorce box."

Now I am an old man.
South Africa is far away,
And I read recently, the conditions
in the mines are much more humane.
Emmeline now is old enough
to bequeath her ring to a daughter.

Vern Fein

Popcorn Revenge

Most children learned of Squanto, the Wampanoag native who blessed the starving settlers, gave lessons on growing corn (put a dead fish with each seed), which saved so many those first sparse years.

Most children never heard of Quadequine, who first put fire to that delicacy, called it popped, parched or rice corn, shared with his new Pilgrim friends.

The amity disappeared. Standish, Bradford, Winslow, enjoyed that fare while roasting their neighbors and stealing their land.

Postlude to Thanksgiving, prelude to genocide, over centuries. Natives killed by the pop, pop, pop of guns that slew the buffalo, massacred the Nations.

Popcorn, the only snack Depression people could afford, a snack for the down and out. Now 17 billion quarts a year feasted on by mouths of poor and privileged alike.

Doubt Quadequine drizzled butter and salt all over the corn?
But later the offspring of those settlers chose to slather it,
exploding their own fat hearts, one bad habit in our obese history.

Vern Fein, a recent octogenarian, has published over 300 poems and short prose pieces in over 100 different sites. A few are: *Gyroscope Review*, *Young Raven's Review*, *Bindweed*, **82 Review*, *River And South*, *Grey Sparrow Journal*, and *Rat's Ass Review*. His second poetry book—REFLECTION ON DOTS—was released late last year.

Zeina Ash Tayir

Displacement

I never knew why one thing repeats
Itself like clockwork in the recesses of our minds
Why something simple like packing a bag
Full of the things you'll need forever now
Could feel so important
Shared with the wrong women somehow
Not the ones that raised me
Not the ones that dried my tears and bathed me.
They died.

Goodbye Barbies, you were full of stories
Little notes of me, baby prints left over
Goodbye to the last of my scrunchies
The 80s were over
We could move on
Move on from Guns n' Roses
Move on from Africa

Zeina Ash Tayir

Radiance

I remembered you in the sun again

Of how you held out your arm to me
When we hiked the edges of the Gatineau cliffs,
Atop logs that seemed sturdy, at first

I thought of how your Filipino co-workers used to say:
Doesn't he look like Jesus?
And I would laugh at
The absurd notion that Jesus looked anything like you
In your white, hot rage?
Radiant!
It left me blind

I imagined us not letting go again
Like when I slipped off that rock in Pink Lake,
Legs aching and arms of stories.

Zeina Ash Tayiris a writer living in Ottawa, Canada. Her reviews have appeared on Medium publications such as *The Book Cafe*, *Fanfare* and *Cinemia*, as well as the lit magazine *The South Shore Review*. Her poetry will appear in *Parley Lit* as of March 2025.

Cam Joyce

Last Night Liminal

For Woody Guthrie's So Long, it's Been Good to Know Yuh

All that time, and
This is what it comes
Back to, here we
All are again
I'll wash the blood
From your skin
If you wash mine;
It's not nothing but
spirit, and we know
These ones well,

Pass me a cup;
Tonight we'll
Drink the blood,
hold them close,
Let the ghosts coat
our throats. We've got
one last night liminal;
Dawn must rise again,
So long to all
These little stars, soon
We'll be with the spirits

But right now,
this world don't have
shit on us.
Climb the roof to
watch the fireworks but
Be gone before the morning;
Not nothing but
the neighborhood,
so long to
All us little stars.

Cam Joyce

Refraction

In the last dream I ever want to have
we are standing barefoot in the
grass, dew staining our soles. And
you turn back, and you look at me. You
look at me.

*In the first memory I have of you, your mom baked a blueberry pie, for us to all eat
together after we said grace. After the sunset, when night had come and we were eating dinner.
Not until then.*

You were looking at me. The wind had
blown a strand of hair onto your cheek, it
was stuck right there. And you asked me:
what are you looking at? You were laughing,
until I said you, I am
looking at you.

*But we didn't care. The sunlight was refracting and fracturing on our faces, and you were
right in front of me, sweet sticky juice running down your grubby fingers, staining your cheeks. I
remember wanting nothing more than to wipe it off.*

You walked back to me, a halo of fire
against your back. You said don't look
at me, look at the sunset. And I replied
the sun has always been setting, can't I
look at you for just a moment, to satiate my
hunger?

*Neither of us even really liked pie. We just knew it was something we could not have, and
we wanted a taste of that.*

You told me my dear, we have all
the time in the world to look at each
others' faces. And I didn't tell you, but
there was no time, we were not allowed
to have this. You told me to look at the
coming of night, and then you weren't
looking at me anymore
(this is where I always wake up).

Cam Joyce is a sixteen year old creative writing major at Interlochen Arts Academy. You can find her work and *The Raven Review* and *The Red Wheelbarrow*, as well as some other small publications. She looks forward to connecting with other young writers in everything she does.

Kirk Lawson

A wound is an opening

Thank you for slicing me open.
You chase me through a sliding glass door
and then shout Stop just as I break
through the panel, a shard crashing down
gashes me open in full view
parents and guests seated beyond.

Thank you for kicking me metaphorically
while already down
wounded and self-conscious.
You rename me *Railroad-Track Back*
your reference to sixty eight stitches
that criss-cross up my left shoulder.

Years thereafter I wear a t-shirt at the pool,
change in the locker room after PE class
with my back to the wall
walking shirtless on a sunny beach
my torso twisted, so as to hide
my hideous flaw.

Thank you for teaching me how to stand tall
in high school. Steering me from the jerks
pointing me towards the right teachers.
I learn then my wound is an opening
to free me from the foolish myth of perfection
rough, unfiltered, unpolished.

Admired for the thick scarred skin
slapped on the back or high-fived
for its coolness or
caressed for its sexiness
touching me.

Kirk Lawson

In concert with

a flock of birds
wings hugging tight before lift off
an upward trajectory
soaring in unison beak to tail
an orchestrated flight.

a troupe of dancers
bending at ankle and knee
pressing down to spring up
arching the foot, pointing and flying
synchronous leaps of faith.

a chorus of singers
relaxing throat muscles
inhaling more space into the jaw
breathing deep into belly
harmonizing tones of every shape.

Imagine a community united
singing, dancing
taking care of each other
soaring beyond
any one of us alone.

Kirk Lawson lives Ulster County, New York, surrounded by the Shawangunk mountains. He enjoys poetry as a creative outlet to uncover meaning in living. He has been published in *Discretionary Love*. Recently retired, Kirk also enjoys volunteer work, yoga, music, cooking and theatre. Grateful to his husband Jim and their dog Cocoa for all they teach him each day.

Toshani O.S. Nath

Immortality of a Memory

A sharp, gentle strum of voices parade through the halls of youthful minds,
An impression, suggesting that all that was to come would be left behind,
Why do I cry so soon?
A dullness within my hand restricts my clamour
To the top of the sinners ladder, I need to escape
From this poor mortality of matter –
A cast is thrown.
To show, and made to grieve
A short sudden
Life
Too quickly unseen.

*In Memory of Miss C.,
And all the unforgettably inspiring teachers,
mentors, and professors have too soon left
This world.*

Toshani O.S. Nath is an Indian-born writer and poet based in Trinidad and Tobago. Alongside being a writer, she is a blogger, artist, musician, scuba diver and lifelong learner. She has anonymously self-published poetical works and short fiction on her blog since she was fifteen. She lives with her husband, James and two canine children, Mindy and Spartacus.

Blaire Baron

Incident at the Mission

The road to Mission San Miguel is dirt.
Even now.
The old town is a ghost,
But the mission beckons,
People not like us
sell crafts and warm brownies, wedding cookies
From behind iron gates
Helping the forgotten mission.
I wander uphill to the chapel.
Naked frescoes on adobe walls
Quietly scream into me.
Chipped statues rasp at me.
The incident that happened here
Has not faded
But snowballed with ferocity that
The memory is stronger than the incident.
I didn't imagine the killing.
I dropped the warm brownies
And hopped on the happy freeway home.

Blaire Baron is an award-winning director, playwright, published poet and founder of the Shakespeare Youth Festival. Her play *Milk Meetings* won Outstanding Achievement in Playwriting at The Ophelia (NYC) with a 10-week run at Studio C/Theatre Row, Hollywood. *The Below* was named Best of Fringe and selected for New York New Works 2016. *Unspoken* received the Encore Award and Best of Fringe; *The Basket Weaver* was produced at Playwrights Horizons for the Samuel French Playwrights Festival, while *The Gentry of Essex* was selected for the 2023 Powerstories' Playwrights Festival and performed at The Blank Theatre in Hollywood. Beyond the stage, Blaire conceived and wrote *Women In Boxes*, an award-winning documentary about the hidden world of professional magic assistants. She is also the recipient of the PBS Community Champion Award and the Award of Merit from the City of Los Angeles for her contributions to the arts.

Chris Graves

Signal and Noise

I extend my antennae upward into the fever. The high winds sting like static, but the snowfall refuses to be grasped.

I reach higher. If I hold still, the message might come through. I listen. Just wind. Just snow. Nothing but white noise.

I tilt my hands. I think of something else. I tilt them again.

Then: the only snowflake in the world lands on my black glove.

I am under attack from the clouds—but it feels like love.

The street is silent except for tires on snow. Sidewalks speak in footprints, roads in ghost treads. A sliver of exposed asphalt dares to tell a story. The wind whirls past, click-ticking in phantom snowflake heels.

The air is sharp, the kind of cold that makes my lungs ache. Snow blankets everything. Even the bonsai tree cradles half-moon pearls in its emerald branches.

It falls in frequency. Each flake a flash of light, especially those caught in the headlights. The signal flares, fades, flickers. For a heartbeat, snowfall outshines the night.

Snow is not a single moment—flake on skin—but an experience. One by one, perception by perception, the milky tangle of winds paperweights the flakes. The large ones briefly sail skyward. The confetti ones, air-trapped, drop truer.

Messages arrive like snowfall. Some settle, some melt. Some disappear.

The signal infiltrates my veins. A ghost-voice in radio static. I thought I'd silenced it, but words flicker through my blood.

You said this. You did that.

No—these words aren't mine. Or maybe they are. Maybe all words are adrift, seeking minds to blanket.

I twist the dial—static-shhhhk!—A voice breaks through.

Listen, it says.

I slam the radio off.

Voices carry across snowbanks, meanings blurring like headlights on road signs. Their warnings—*Blind crest*—vanish. *One way*.

The bonsai, a question mark against the snow, twists like a letter I once misunderstood. The words were clear. The fear, veiled.

Frost clings to skin like ink to paper, but the vehicle and its passenger are not always one. Some messages, like winter's crispness, are unread until warmth unlocks them—frost-red cheeks, the sharp scent of elsewhere, a code deciphered once inside a front door. Home.

The treads are only the beginning, like grooves on a record. Music isn't the needle on the vinyl. The real ghost-dance is when I've walked these paths, when my experience scores the silence. The real music is that ache.

I can't breathe for the flurry. Defying the cold, I stare back. See through the flakes for the whole, through the cloud for the world.

Seeing between falling flakes is easy. Harder when they have landed, guarding their secrets.

Can't catch a cloud, but maybe land a flake on my tongue. Taste-test for storm. Can't stand on top of a cloud. But snow? I stand on the sky, piece by piece.

The snow slows to a stop, leaving only loud winds licking long white dunes.

The bonsai's question mark still cradles miniature moons, still waits for the thaw.

Does the answer arrive as a signal? Or when I hear my own heartbeat?

Through parting clouds, I finally make contact, finally spy the pin cushion night.

Can you love me now, ask the stars.

Chris Graves holds a degree in English Literature from McGill University and has published prose poetry, haiku, and research papers, as well as authored a non-fiction book on the history of religious architecture. An archivist originally from Halifax, Canada, Graves has spent much of their adult life living and working abroad, a perspective that deeply informs their writing.

Dasha Spintov

Etched On February's Stars

To be

Done with the compass;

To be

Done with the chart.

Rowing toward Eden,

My firecat bristled,

Amber eyes blaze,

Tasting the lace of mints,

Austere yet sweet,

All the ghosts we ever knew,

Transparent, thinly calling,

All youth that never died,

Beneath

Icicle night falling.

A wicked February tide,

I climb to dusk apart,

Through

a wilted garden.

1963

On the eleventh

No more words

A big sleep sought in

A stove's maw.

Dasha Spintov, a lyrical wordsmith residing on the East Coast, finds inspiration in the ebb and flow of relationships, including the one with her opinionated feline companion.

Hiram Larew

Starfish

What I love about them
Is probably untrue

But even so
I'm amazed with how they find everything
By touch

Isn't that such a wonderful way to discover

I imagine that they learn
About what's out there
From the tip of each arm

Those five points
Each ending with a curl up
And then over

Curls of seek
And ask

Even though I'm told it's not true
It should be
Because as they know
Whatever gets noticed or realized
Is from feel and by feel
Alone

Hiram Larew's seventh collection of poetry, "This Much Very," was published in 2025 by *Alien Buddha Press*.
www.HiramLarewPoetry.com

Kaitlyn Sun

Shedding

Desiccated tree bark peels off the living thing.
The outgrown exoskeleton is dead and dull amongst the stones.
The ebon armour forged in my youth—each insult
another black scale—now assembles in reverse.

Garnet leaves fall from the black branches of the flame tree,
stark dendrite against azure sky. The red plumage was shed
so easily. It left an upside-down lightning strike,
afterimage of glorious limbs poised in sinless nudity.

Out of the ashes I emerge, translucent and light as heavenly air.
They do not recognise me. There is no anger here—
only gentleness and newness in the unfolding spring.

Kaitlyn Sun is a part-time poet and full-time magical girl. She fights mental demons with words. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Sad Girl Diaries*, *The Cackling Kettle*, *Bitter Melon Review*, and *Querencia Press*, among others. Find her at @sad.magical.girl on Instagram.

Rachel G Maron

Holy Hugs

Watched over and over
again
grasping at hope
for safety and normalcy
to return
while holding the
worry
fear and pain
of each other's
nightmares.
Squeezing out
air between us
separating
who we were
and who we will be
with whole body
pinching
making sure
we are not dreaming
but rather
embracing
a dream.

Lanre Sonde

To Your Earth

Somewhere along Saturn's ring
I boarded a train to your earth
To find answers
To find a meaning
To all the unanswered questions in my life
Your thread, my thread
Meeting in the diverse possibilities of existence
The strings of days and nights
have been waiting for something to happen
for a spark to set our course towards collision
I couldn't have known we were connected
until I touched down on your earth
The painting is clear
I am sure
Wherever I am
I feel you
You are what makes me feel real
I have read many versions of books like the bible
There is only one version of you
You were made for me
And I for you

Lanre Sonde

Seasons

Don't draw me into your world
and leave me unpainted
For you opened my eyes to things unseen
something so bewitching
that my mind keeps spiralling
to decipher such an alluring sight
you seasoned me in an unending love
with a fulfilled feeling
I look forward to every season of our love
A cycle I yearn for
My day and night
Cover me in your vibrant autumn
Watch me Fall
for you like snowflakes to welcome your Winter
Sing to me in Spring
Wake me up to taste your Summer
Refine my lips with your wine
Let it linger into the night
Where the night is yours
Where the night is you
And I your moon
in tune to your blue

Lanre Sonde is a passionate and introspective Nigerian poet, and author, exploring themes of love, social justice, and personal growth. His work resonates with emotional intensity, symbolism, and philosophical depth. Inspired by the human condition, Lanre's poetry navigates complex emotions, relationships, and existential questions. A strong advocate for freedom and self-expression, Lanre's writing challenges societal norms and seeks truth. His poetic journey weaves together personal experiences, historical events, and fictional narratives. His works has been featured at an exhibition at the Great North Museum in Newcastle and Kirkleatham Museum in Redcar, United Kingdom.

Linette Rabsatt

Needing Someone

we all need someone
another being
to stand with us
hold our hands
carry our loads
whisper warm words to our souls
in the sun
or in the rain
on the days
when the pain is the heaviest
when life beats gravity
and holds us down
we need that one
whether on two legs
or four or more
to share that warmth
even when a word
can't be fathomed
we all need someone
another being
to keep us grounded
in this perturbed world

Linette Rabsatt is a Virgin Islands poet with roots in the BVI and USVI who began writing in 1996. You can find her work in her Kindle book, "Be Inspired: Poems by Linette Rabsatt," in *Pulse Poetry Magazine*, on her blog, *Words of Ribbon*, and on the *Visual Verse* and *Micromance Magazine* websites. She was nominated for a 2024 National Spoken Words Award for Best International Artist and won the 2024 Read Yuh Ting TOO Virtual Caribbean Poetry Contest.

Jim Murdoch

Codetta

(for Bev)

So, you weren't in love with me?

It certainly felt like love.

But you're not sure?

Not anymore.

So, maybe it wasn't love after all.

*That would've been sad,
to go through all that
and it not be love.*

But you went through it anyway?

Yes, yes, in case it was.

And was it worth it?

Had I been right it would've been.

But I wasn't.

The you in this poem wasn't.

Not the same.

I could've been.

It's your poem.

I could be madly in love with you still.

*True, but I'm a sentimental fool,
not an idiot.*

Jim Murdoch

Better Reasons

What's the big deal with memory anyway?

Memories are who we are.

But are they? I mean, really?

Because if I'd lived the kind of life
I feel I have why the heck didn't I
hang up my hat ages back?

My guess is, at each junction,
something kept me going but,
honestly, I have no idea what.

I'm not what I remember: hardly.
I'm mostly what I've forgotten
and what I'm trying to forget.

We remember for a reason but
we forget for better reasons.

Jim Murdoch lives down the road from where they filmed Gregory's Girl which, for some odd reason, pleases him no end. He's been writing poetry for fifty years for which he blames Larkin. Who probably blamed Hardy. Jim has published two books of poetry, a short story collection and four novels.

Kinsey Krachinski

Dreams of My Future Child

Your mind is captured in stardust across an open desert
Before the moon shines light on your mind
You gaze up and the Iris of the moon attaches to the iris in your eyes
Your pupils are golden the moment a shooting star crosses your vision
Star-crossed love with nature, living, being, and believing.

My Child, I hope that you care for the world in ways that I failed
Hold yourself responsible for the actions of yourself and others
However, do not let yourself feel responsible for things out of your control
Act in opposition of the hate that fills society daily.

My Child, do not see with just your eyes, but your heart
Look into the souls of the people and view their intentions
Do not settle for less than what Mommy taught you that you deserve.
Learn to protect your mind and your heart.

My Child, cultivate your discipline and channel it into all things
Education, workforce, family, and your friends
Learn to divide and conquer all things you care about for the future
Do not let any of them slip away, because you miss opportunities for a lifetime.

My Child, I tell you these mantras to live by but I fear for you
I fear the moment you lose your belief in a love for life
The life you witnessed wrapped up in bundles under a bundle of stars
In nature, learn this: do not lose faith in yourself or people
Be more than the past and carry the dreams of the baby in my arms
Slipping out of them to pass your star visions to all who listen

Love,

Mom

Kinsey Krachinski

Juxtapositional Offense To The Starry-Eyed Poet

The eye of a poet uses a triangular glass to see the unseen
Looking glass that portrays three facets to the loyal reader
Extended metaphor, subjects, and the journey
We vow not to allow our subjects be cast aside
Readers may not get the physical looking glass
Yet they can draw, paint, and dedicate themselves
Conceptual manifestations of daily life
Words are etched, bled into the skin
Not as punishment or judgment, but like a sermon gone astray

Somehow, we still manage to bleed words into the skin of others
Not by ink, but by a magical font online
Words can travel to the universe above, and they can uplift our ancestral stars
Or take them down from a bedroom ceiling like they are paper.
Letters are crafted out of seeing the glass half empty
No substance to pull or pour, but maybe the glass becomes something more
If water is our number one natural resource, aren't humans supposed to be a resource
Nourish the growth, development, and power it shares with us all?

The phenomenon of strangers finding offense to those who seek monumental success
This will never fail to impress me because these people are imposters
Steps that are taken one by one, earthly vines stretched over the next step
Until these success stories find a way to break the vines in a dense rainforest
These steps were created by man to walk, but not to travel

By God, she was going to find a way to traverse beyond what was possible
So she could speak to the stars, her ancestors
Sharing a colossal story that would write her name among the constellations
She tossed and turned the constellations to create new discoveries
Stars that are dulling out shone brighter
She dares the world below her to explore her craft
Once written in her skin, now an eternal code among the universe

Kinsey Krachinski is a children's author of two books about mental health and kindness. She is working on her first poetry manuscript that contains these poems! Kinsey will start her Master's of English in Fall of 2025. Her dream job is to become a literary agent in publishing! Kinsey loves reading historical romances and listening to meditative music during her free time.

Gina Freyre

He/Streamlined He

Would never get to
See her, feel her, feel the coarseness of skin
As lovers and people do
No—
He wouldn't feel gooseflesh, not in the terms of every little bump and crevice.
Only her tan skin through a movie screen, the sleekness of the cellular phone being his only
companion.
Would never get to sense it viscerally and smell it and see the real smile, dimple curling up in
real time

He pondered.

Sometimes he envied this, longed for this. Even the slightest sounds that would signify real,
non-HD movement—

The lighting of her hair that couldn't be captured by a camera, and that you had to be there to see.
The slight sound as she clicked open her teeth, or opened a packet of gum.

Light shining irregularly from lopsided pink lips. Up close he'd be able to see they were chapped.

And he would like it.

Sensations and slight beams of sun would all combobulate to create this real flower of a girl in
real time, but he couldn't see it.

He never would.

Never would establish that real familiarity in which it was comfortable to hold her, to laugh with
her, to embody every sensation.

That ability had left him long ago.

Not even dust he could witness

Floating on down. No splashes of water, no scuff scuff of sound. Nothing.

Simply all streamed

And he wondered, for the first time, what that
really...

meaned.

Gina Freyre is a young writer/artist from Southern California. Currently she attends California State University of Fullerton, and has had her work published in *The Letters Home Collection*, *Girlhood Magazine*, *The Petrichor Gazette*, and more. Currently she is trying to focus on writing things that matter to her and things she finds important in the world today.

Prithvijeet Sinha
SENTINEL

The half-written poem
awaits a full spring.
The sky awaits none.

Under this sky,
a fascinating sentinel
has taken his first
warm bath
and shows the sun
a collage of yellow flowers—
like folded hands,
the flowers take their shapes.

How lovely are February mornings—
a true romance in plain view
of a spectator
who detests the thievery
around 'love'
but nevertheless
knows
what love constitutes—
the deed
and the meaning
I sought
without
much effort
are here.

The sentinel
proudly braids his head
with the charisma
of yellow leaves
in spring
and his dozen hands
open

with pirouettes.
Like a ballet dancer,
he shows himself
to me.

It's a moving picture of life.
So small and inconsequential
are we,
deceiving ourselves
with humour
and forced humilities.

Just look at the sentinel.
Can there be
anything more
beatifically confident
in this city
than him, looking out for
ravens, pigeons and parakeets
and exuding breaths
for faraway
pimpernels?

The half-written poems
await a full spring.
The sentinel awaits none.

Prithvijeet Sinha, a proud resident of the cultural epicenter that is Lucknow. His prolific published credits encompass poetry, musings on the city, cinema, anthologies, journals of national and international repertoire as well as a blog. His life-force resides in writing, in the art of self-expression.

Arthur Neong

Ghazal: Migrant

I wish everybody would call my name
The way my grandmother called my name

Before I came to Malaysia, looking for a better place
Now I wait on people who can't say my name

I serve food in a restaurant, wash dishes, cook chilli pan mee
In the kitchen, learn trade secrets from the boss, who still can't say my name

I try to talk to the customers, learn from them their ways
But in the end I stick to my own kind, those who can say my name

I meet a girl, she has strong straight teeth and her dimple and thanaka are like the moon
We walk in pasar malam, holding hands, haggling with sellers who can't say my name

The girl becomes my wife, her name is Pich, we don't talk during the day
But at night, I like the way she whispers my name

We have a daughter now, she has her mother's dimple, her name is Chandarith
I want her to go to school, become a teacher, so that everyone will know our name

Arthur Neong was born in Sungai Petani, Kedah, Malaysia in 1986 but is now based in Shah Alam, Selangor. Growing up, he read books on horror and adventure. He was a school teacher for 11 years before taking a break for a little reflection. He is now writing during his spare time and seeking more experience, while working on his MA in Creative Writing. He is a Malaysian Chinese.

Ramiro Valdes

Chronic illness

Chronic illness has set ablaze
The buds which spring
Would have matured
Into a field of hope,
Instead,
Blackened and plucked stems
Adorn my soul
Into a dark vest of solitude
And the ground is an ashtray
Of burned wishes
That have long perished
In the jaws of oblivion
Whose smoke dims
The sky above me
Into a starless night

Ramiro Valdes (he/him) is a disabled and aspiring poet from Miami.

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Future Issues

We're thrilled to announce that our next issue, Issue No. 8, *Verbum Clavis*, 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 sixth issue, and we extend our thanks to all the writers for making this dream come true!

Until next time,
The Everscribe Team

