

Otherwise Engaged

A Literature and Arts Journal

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(PART II)

Edited and Compiled

By Marzia Dessi

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Otherwise Engaged

Literature and Arts Journal

Submissions

Otherwise Engaged is a biannual literature and arts journal open to submissions from all artists, writers, and photographers worldwide.

Guidelines

- Flash Fiction (500-1500 words)
- Short Stories (up to 4000 words)
- Creative Nonfiction (up to 4000 words)
- Poetry: (3-5 poems)
- Art & Photography (JPEG) (Black and white only)

Please submit all written work in .doc, docx, or rtf formats.

With the exception of poetry and art/ photography, please limit entries to one story or essay.

When entering a submission, please include a 20-50 word biography to be printed alongside your piece in the event that it is accepted for publication.

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by Shehab Adel

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Parallels (1)

by Alexander Limarev | digital manipulation | Siberia | 2023



YULETIDE FABLE #1

By Dmitriy Galkovskiy Translated by Alexander Sharov

A certain classical rodent distinguished by keen inquisitiveness was once ferreting around in the winery, collapsed into the amphora and precipitately choked to death on wine. On the ensuing day the amphora was expedited to the quayside where it was loaded onto a vessel. Thunderbolts fulminated into the vessel during a tempest, conflagration erupted and the argosy sank midway en route from Jaffa to Piraeus. In 3694 the amphora with mummified crystallized ullage was surfaced and a fossilized rat was hewn out from it. The architectonics of the specimen's volatile memory was successfully dumped through algebraic mapping, and by proxy of the 16-dimensional mainframe, emulating lower mammalian sensorial susceptibility, relevant footage sequence was visualized. It transpired that the rat which so (in) felicitously floundered into the amphora, six hours heretofore had been in attendance during interrogation of Christ by Pontius Pilate.

In 5118 a retro-electronic archaeological mission fortuitously lucked upon clandestine findings on that matter. Regretfully, the then retrieved informational chip of the iconic grid NN-4 was almost utterly vandalized, and, in the ultimate reckoning, the system yielded a swath of the spreadsheet of contents, disparate fragments of the dialogue and two video snapshots (from amongst the total of two millions). A sessile gentleman robed in Roman vice-regal vestments was seen on the former, the least corrupted frame. The optics is extraordinarily bungled: worm's-eye and lateral-side views. A hulking Romanesque-sandaled foot is visible, a disproportionately dwarfish head with a comparatively hypertrophied mandible,

a forearm with a sigil ring rests on the knee. Opposite stands Christ – an approximately quadragenarian, swarthy-complexioned Semite, luxuriously gowned, aquiline hooked nose, wispy beard, bloated cheeks. The focalization of the snapshot (chromatic splotch) is the sigil ring, ostentatiously flamboyant one, supposedly, the artifact riveting the gnawer’s alertness this particular second. The latter snapshot is severely blurred. Pilate is scarcely discernible thereon. Christ is expostulating on something, gesticulating with his hand straightly at the rat. A hexapod (conjecturally, *Blatta orientalis*) is zigzagging across the foreground. The semantic cynosure of the snapshot is not prioritized. Evidently, the instant of shifting attention from the insect on the background is videoed. Ostensibly, the rat lusted to ingurgitate the *Blattoptera* but was diverted by an exclamation.

Extant gleanings from the conversation were exportable solely into plain textual file format. Consequently, fidelity of disambiguation between who had apostrophized whom could not have been validated. The duologue was held in Latin bureaucratese of the 1st century AD, and respective sayings were, with a certain degree of tentativeness, rendered into icon-based Vision English. Altogether, nineteen nuggets were unscrambled:

1. Now then, we shall be sorting out the question in terms of funding.
2. Let us conventionalize thus.
3. It is opined that thy folks ought to be disposed of.
4. Where is your acolyteship?
5. Thou wilt become shorter by the head.
6. Where is the baksheesh?

7. Now, we shall be resolving the question of talents' casting.
8. Hands will be struck upon (*).
9. To vilipend and denigrate.
10. To tweak the issue.
11. Incentivizing and streamlining the modus operandi.
12. To provincialize it to the Collegium? The Sun is surer to prostrate down onto the Earth!
13. In a wrongful light.
14. When the time is ripe, we shall moot this suggestion likewise.
15. From the rightful perspective, delight of my eyes.
16. A clerkly drudge.
17. Twist the neck off the parasitical bourgeois rat.
18. The sycophant must be hung on a rope's end moistened in asinine urine.

The last nineteenth piece was identified as positively attributable to Christ:

19. I beseech thee not to intimidate me anymore. Altogether, I am clueless as to what Your August Lordship is speaking about. I shall resurrect and persist everlastingly. My father, Lord, my God hath behested thus!

*) Hereunder is obfuscated whether figuratively or in the truest sense of the word.

Willow Tree Poem

By Michael Lee Johnson

Wind dancers
dancing to the
willow wind,
lance-shaped leaves
swaying right to left
all day long.
I'm depressed.
Birds hanging on-
bleaching feathers
out into
the sun.

Last December Dance

By Paul W. Hunt

Published in 'A Celebration of Poets', Showcase Edition, The Poetry Guild, 1998

Their freedom dance is not forgotten –
They had gone mad in the streets,
And driveways, clearings, anywhere
That they had fallen.

They spun their whirling dervish –
Driven round about
By the devilish fall wind,
Jumping out at cars,
You could almost hear their joyous yelling –
Free at last from the trees that suckled them,
In summer's lethargic sun.

(The breeze was gentle then,
Not wild and pushy.)

I didn't want to drive through their party,
But they were everywhere,
How could I not?

Looking in my mirror afterward,
I saw I had added new spirit to their frenzy –
Pulled up the fallen ones,
Changed the whole direction,
Added new technique to their twist and shout.

It's almost over though –
The leaves are desperate now,
Trying to find some haven,
A quiet corner and wait to be tucked in
Under a soft snow blanket.

Longing now to sleep.

Most have done that.
The party's over.

A Richard few remain –
They still jump out at passing cars,
It seems a foolish effort now –
I don't slow down to watch them.

We're trying to find our safe haven.
Something we don't understand makes us want to.

ROY G. BIV

by Adam Barentine

I'd like to thank God,
or whomever,
for creating such a broad spectrum of light.
Thank you for giving me
enough colors to pick my mood.
The rainbow palette falling onto the page
through the sun-soaked window
offering me options of being.
Abandoning the binary.
This world is capable of more
than two opposing views.
Give me a list of violets.
I require choices with my reds.
Blues for every occasion
from sadness to a newborn baby boy.
The entirety of life
reflected in the spray
of a Sunday afternoon sprinkler.

I've got a knit Afghan that won't keep you warm

By Jeff Lincoln

I've got a knit Afghan that won't keep you warm

A collection of stamps

Milk crates for your dorm

You can pick from the Wheatie pennies

Hardees Loony Toons cups

But don't come for my

Coupon Keeper

My Coupon Keeper unfolds

like the opening of a daffodil

It saves more than preachers

And laughs at retail

Take the bottle collection

The cigar boxes, the toys

Raid the puzzles and hard candy dish

Dented soup cans or National Geographics

My Coupon Keeper finds value

In markets up or down

And long after this world's reached its expiration date

Will still be keeping on

Parallels (2)

by Alexander Limarev | digital manipulation | Siberia | 2023



It Is Raining Again

By J.M. Summers

It is raining again, but there is coffee, and the papers, and love, and poetry, and despite the mess the spring has made of things so far, the tulips have begun to bud, and daffodils and snow-drops, and there is the coming weekend, and beer, and whisky, and who cares at the end of the week if it makes you ill (and don't tell me that you don't prefer Saturday mornings like that), and Netflix, and the rugby, and the new coffee machine, and perhaps time for a walk, and a crossword, or two, and good night, and good night, and cwtches, and then tell me that you can only find three things to be grateful for.

Tidings

By Michael Igoe

Amber is the color of fear,
in the center of a stoplight.

An amber chosen,
as one of the hues.

Armadillo, armadillo,
at the fork in the road.

Singing on an Easter
snarling and feasting,
under the waning sun.

Waiting for St. Anne,
who deals every card,
faceless and senseless.

Tumbling to the felt,
in downward spirals.

The best bet against,
unhappy childhoods.

Horse

By Binod Dawadi



The Mountain Top

By J.M. Summers

The mountain top is hidden.

We labour under the weight
of the mist that shrouds it.

Quiesced. Liberated
from the ordinary.

The birds are silenced,
expectant of revelation,
the possibility of change.

Hush, from the babel of voices,
the light of the cross that
burns, nightly. The promise
of suffering offered; the
boundaries of love, exposed.

Between the Battles

C. J. Anderson-Wu

We leaned our rifles against the wall climbed by ivy

It was weird that the green vine survived the intensive bombing

Squatting down, we shared a cigarette

Olek, you?

Mykola.

What did you do before the war?

I am a poet.

I laughed, Who could make a living by being a poet?

I don't. I make a dying.

The air froze for a second,

The ivy seemed to grow an inch further

Who isn't? I said.

In the Break of Our March

By C. J. Anderson-Wu

In the break of our march

Andriy stood by a puddle

looking down at the water

I approached him to check out

What intrigued him

On the surface was his bearded face

“My mother won’t recognize me now,” Andriy said

I looked at myself on the puddle, too

It was from the melted snow only a couple of weeks ago

The background of my exhausted face was

The blue sky, cloudless

One by one,

every man of our platoon went to look at himself

Then we marched on in silence

Knowing that not all of our mothers

Were going to see his sons again

Parallels (3)

by Alexander Limarev | digital manipulation | Siberia | 2023



Sorry, We Bring You Bad News

C. J. Anderson-Wu

It pains to witness the death of your pals

It pains to bring the bad news to their families

It pains to face their loss and questioning,

“Why did you survive, but not my boy?”

“Damped oscillations”

By Stanka Bajlozova-Barlamova

I leave the small cup on the make-up side table. The first sip lurches down my throat with intentions of returning it to the oral cavity, dragging with it the remains of food from all parts of the abdomen. I stubbornly send her down the same path back into the pharynx. This time it aggressively scrapes and burns my esophagus, descending into the bottom of the stomach cavity and shredding all the debris that the gastric acids have failed to break up. It is forty-two percent alcohol, damn it. Homemade, it cooked in the village, made not by squeezing, but made with a firm grip of galoshes on the gutter. First-female, second-nothing... One child - one “rakija”¹...Angry and bitter like a strong woman. It made to measure, both spicy and bitterness... I drink the rest that will work in the interest of tuning and fitting the channels for personal confidence. The doping on freshly painted nails is pouring into my nasal cavities. My feet fit firmly on the high heels that contribute to my average height gaining at least seven more centimeters. I take the white suit coat and just put it on my shoulders. Before I press the light switch I think about not leaving a trace of freshly painted nails. The key in the lock creaked twice.

I never liked the big city environments. Every time I came to the capital was a gallop from the moment I arrived to the moment I left. The smoke, the city traffic, the suffocation and the handicap of not being able to breathe fresh morning air mixed with the smell of lindens, created a feeling of contusion in my chest. My temporary living in the shell of "sacred and bright urban hedonism", was an athesia² and an unsolvable biochemical equation, for which from the perspective of the time I don't know if the life had final results.

If my grandfather knew how today's horses work, I'm not sure if he would have talked about his heritage in his last

moments or if he would have just calmly watched our faces while life's karma did its job.

"Throughout the course of living,
you will pay for every good thing.

Life will try to pay you well
for every benefit."

"One awoken creepy sadness,
and the other one longing,
both bright and hungry."³

Life is like a colorful laundry machine. Both and the black, and the white, and the colored ones discharge their impurities into the same drain hose. The initial and original form is inherent only to forms that do not having transformations. The human forms are constantly undergoing transformations. Centrifuging through the clean and impure waters of life, everyone perceives something from someone and from somewhere. Immediately after the first wash, the white acquires shades. Over time the shades will experience a gradual gradation, but by the time when we perceive the anomalies, it is usually too late.

Each one of us carry the own load of responsibility throughout life. There is no man as light as a feather dancing under the heavens. Someone once said: "There is no greater hell than the one we are living today on this earth." In view of my life perceptions at the time, I would say that it is right. Most often, we choose how much carries and luggage we will take with us. Packing suitcases is an individual work, but it is also a work of art. Some people take everything with them, others

carefully choose what they will take with them, and there are those who take nothing with them wherever they go. The oscillations and immanence do the typing.

Her hair was tied up in a bun that looked like a big ball of "sarma"⁴ The colorful shirt revealed a bloated stomach that looked like a freshly soaked bun. Her front teeth were taken out and her lips were hot from the wild currents of the wind. The old woman was sitting on the bench at the bus stop and dissatisfied she was eating from the greasy meat. The wind was blowing through her limp coat, on the surface of which a few oily puddles could be seen. Bites from the meat were chewed by the aging lips like tough roots in the night, for which the cap of the esophagus, barely and lazily opened.

Parking the car, I just stepped over the white line staring at the old lady sitting at the bus stop across the street. I turned several times to the old woman while my high heels headed for the entrance of the high-rise building.

The philosophies of life are nothing but coded chapters. Not everyone gets what they deserve and what they need in life. Each new day is someone's new substrate for swallowing air in sufficient or deficient quantities and forms.

"I am a professional television presenter and program editor. What are the attributes that reflect my hidden self? Ah yes... I am addicted to chocolates and other such sweet little pleasures. Name? Martin Idn! Call me Mi."

About forty minutes have passed since the last sip was taken. I haven't even stood in front of the mirror yet, and I already see my cheeks red and at the same time as perfectly hidden as a second layer of palm-shaped female powder. Tonight I am leading a concert of several famous names from

the musical scene. I hold a rehearsal for several minutes and already in the first few seconds I grab the true color of my the voice. In the first few rows, eighty percent are politicians - darkness before the eyes. Snobbery that promiscuously produces occultism.

For me, the first ten minutes are crucial for the performances. This time, I have excellent command of both voice and articulation, the self-confidence reaches a satisfactory subjective level, and adrenaline stimulates the senses. After finishing I went out into the lobby where I could see most of the audience that attended the concert. I could hear chattering conversations from all sides. Most of the people are known to the public.

- Wow man, that coat is beautiful. I tell you, "Chanel" is always the right thing for you.

- Did you manage to flatter the new woman who works in your office? If you succeeded with her... Ah, brother, you are a great man!

- Did you see the videos about Vanja? She's hot, mate, I'll send you to wash your eyes.

- Don't you know the latest gossip? Wow, what are you missing Anee! Her husband caught her with another man.

- Aww, what are you talking about?

- My child took drugs... My Peter? Oh, nonsense, what can I tell you... Ah, I have to go dear, hairdresser, pedicure, massage, urgent, urgent tasks are waiting for me!

True naturalism and the dregs of society do not live only in beggar quarters, brothels, run-down hospitals, drug clubs, nursing homes and sanatoriums. In the environment which I lived, the elite circle and top of society was nothing but a hollow walnut shell, which was rotten and empty at the core.

Here the dregs and top of society were coherent and equal in meaning.

- The charismatic and popular Mi! – a deep male tenor voice slowly approached me from behind.

- Darian Trifunov, it's such an honor to meet you. – even before I turned my face, he had already extended his right palm frontally as a sign of acquaintance and greeting.

I only knew him from social media. He was arrogant, narcissistic and self-absorbed, slightly handsome, partly attractive, but talented and professional enough to be classified as born for the stage. He didn't do concerts. He led the biggest festivals, and the most desired projects that always ended up in his hands.

- You know, beautiful women are remembered only for one night, you can't get smart women out of your head because their speculations start ringing in your deepest dreams and so they slowly begin to steal your peace, but there are also those that you know that are an endemic species the first time you see them.

- What kind of shit? – I thought, while I put my lips together in a cultured smile.

- I have no doubts at all about your refined taste when it comes to the more beautiful, oops, the better half. – my sharpened senses worked with consistent speed to x-ray his psychophysics in the embodiment of a twisted macho style.

- Are you messing around with famous female names again, mate? How many of them can you remember? – his name was Tomislav Kirko. He was a well-known guitarist who played with several bands around town.

- I will not forget her even in my dream.

- Not on any other woman's ass with a volume of more than fifteen centimeters, idiot. - I whispered, as I pursed the lines of my lips again into a subdued element of a smile.

I considered such extremely nonchalant male phrases as degradation of the more beautiful, "sorry", stronger half. If he was not a presenter by profession, I would say he is a toilet paper collector. Images came flooding into my mind, as he tore off and collected a soft white square from each toilet. Various shapes of heavenly origin are often engraved on toilet paper. Heavenly shapes that people used to wipe their asses. The people often exert physiological needs on filigree life forms on the toilet paper. Darian Trifunov was one of those who often poop on what they consider endemic, filigree and special.

On the way out of the high-rise building, I looked at the stop where the old woman was sitting a few hours ago. The bench was empty, there was no one. I wanted to turn around at least one more time, but the suggestive thought of instinct glued my body to the driver's seat. The rattling of the key was heard behind the steering wheel, and I slowly started moving the car along the narrow street.

People very often speak without any particular intention and goal to say something. They often utter words only to fill the void in the silence. Such frequent surroundings drained my batteries.

The furious movements of the acacia branches blur my view outside. I don't see clearly. I wonder if I really want to see something? I often knew how to stand in front of the window and look at the infinity of the horizon for hours, at the same time I did not notice details, which did not go unnoticed especially by observers of piquanteries. I just wanted to look at the people who were calmly walking down the street, their calm

overwhelmed me too. I pull out a white notebook-sized envelope from the left drawer under the window.

Place of sending: 115114, Россия, Moscow, st. Летниковская, 10с2.

Inside the envelope – there is a plasticized cardboard greeting card. In the bottom right corner - a mark whose initials can be deciphered using special lamps or only with special viewing glasses.

Share

certificate

E***H III Limited

The company is authorized to issue a maximum of 146 985 725 432 with a par value of USD 1.00 of a single class.

Certificate owner: Miss Mi X

Reg. no. 1998916

I put the envelope and the plasticized cardboard back in the drawer, and I start work on my home laptop while opening several platforms. The usual procedure of the "open - hide window" relationship allows me a detailed overview of all my recent steps and operations. One of the e-marketing platforms is causing me frustrations. At the moment, all my money functions only as virtual securities whose currencies are equivalent to real zero. I feel calm and comfortable in my plush nightgown with patterns of unknown characters from some current children's movies. My hair is tied in a sloppy and loose bun from which countless electrified hairs stick out, associating with undefined aerial devices. The prescription glasses spice up my relaxed home style. To hell with all the make-up and all the tight cloths that from time to time, as needed and without need, occupy and possess my body. Cotton underwear and

plush pajamas give me the necessary freedom in which I sink, indulge and make love with life.

My next walking to work happened a few days later. On the list of the working repertoire I had a concert again. Before I got to the parking in front of the high-rise building, I turned down the first side street to the right of the boulevard. I was startled seeing the old woman again, this time in front of the market where I often bought some small things. He munched greedily on the dry morsels which he dipped from time to time into the can of cheap pâté, which must have read, in fine print, "factory-cleaned wild boar skin."

Leaving from the market, I didn't even notice that my hands were dirty from the expired bag of red berries. I touched the car window glass. It was wet from the rain and I partially washed my hands. Instead of continuing to look around, I hurried to grab the steering wheel that was now sliding so easily left and right inside my palms.

Aesthetics without semantics and form without essence is a whole without a whole. Each of my next go to work stimulated my thoughts about forms and their essence. Most of the time, the majority is looking for forms, not substance. The people began to fall in love with objects and not with people. I live in an arrangement of cannibalism, where anthropomorphic and animal forms have become identical in meaning.

The vibrations of my cell phone take my mind off from my current reality. One of the platforms sends signals about the possibility of withdrawing cash. The electronic digits my cell phone displays boggles my mind. I can't afford to withdraw them through ATMs. The system and the public revenue administration must not have an insight into my accounts. Within twenty-four hours I have to convert them into a tangible object - real estate! The card is electronic and it is not connected to any domestic bank. Until the moment of the next

system shutdown, the electronic mobile numbers will be equal to zero, and I will convert their true value into title deeds. A hit!

During a whole year, I changed absolutely nothing in the profile of life habits and daily activities. I continued to come to work with my green Volkswagen Beetle with a production date of 10/2/2009. I reduced shopping activities by fifty percent compared to the past two years, and I replaced the outings with work activities on additional e-platforms.

Rumors began to be heard that restrictions would be implemented in the company in terms of salaries and the number of employees. The state and society were facing a severe economic crisis, such as had not been seen in the last hundred years.

I felt ready for all the changes that, like a winter storm, were expected to set fire to our previously peaceful dreams.

-The inflation will swallow us up. Our income has become ridiculous in comparison with the primary needs. – the female voices were heard in the lobby.

- We will drown in the sludge of society. Everything turns into sediment, there will not be a single sprout that promises hope.

- Let everything go to hell. A cocktail of love and ideals kills even the strongest military leaders.

A conversation between colleagues initiated murderous desperation.

- How is Mi? Will we be able to finish this month or will this week finish us? – the conversation slowly and slyly penetrated the pores of my tranquility.

I could hardly hide my feelings. Most of the time, emotions betrayed me as readable expressive lines that slowly but surely were drawn on the frontal parts of my face.

- The right choices are immune to everything that surrounds us. It is desirable that the intensity of the conscience is always at least one degree higher than the emotions. – I could not see the objectively, I suppose that the expression on my face created an impression and a feeling of insecurity.

- A pseudonymous and intriguing answer that opens up topics for thought, Mi.- On the faces of my colleagues it was I had seen countless questionnaires that initiated prompting many answers.

Fortunately, I was preparing to leave and got out of the situation of turning myself into a spicy target and object of research. I rarely shared information from my private life with people in the circles in which I moved. I almost never encouraged expansion and knowledge of any step taken. My things and my happenings in life were only mine, there was no place for anyone else.

"Our lives are defined by the opportunities, even the ones we lose."⁵ According to unwritten terms and rules, life serves us meals, excrement to some, snacks to others. Do you believe in fortune telling and in three good fairies who wrote your life from the beginning to the end you were born? I go through thinking phases when I don't even know what I believe in and what I don't. "When a person stops believing in God, it means that he has stopped believing in anything. Then he believes everything."⁶

A lot of people are moving towards the airport. The wheels of the suitcase slide along the floor surface producing sounds that are similar to a train going along a track.

I bought a newspaper and a pastry, and I headed to the waiting room looking for a suitable empty seat. It was full of people. Searching with my gaze in the crowd I saw an empty chair and with a quick step I continued forward. Approaching the empty space, two gulps of saliva slurped down my throat as my gaze in the direction of the empty space began to transform into a startled and hypnotized gaze that paralyzed my body. The old lady whom I often met at the bus stop was now sitting on the sideways of the empty seat that I had hurried towards a few seconds ago. Could this old woman be following my movements? Within a few seconds, collages of thoughts passed through my head, which were synonymous with a chemical equation with incompatible elements and molecules, the sum of which in one place caused imaginary explosions. Our eyes met. Her fiery gaze resembled that of an angry and wounded she-wolf. In the aging eyes, I seemed to see all the hunger and thirst that plagued humanity. This time, her hands did not hold food scraps, but her palms and her long nails glistened with some kind of greasiness. With partial uncertainty and hesitation in movements and gestures, I came closer to her, handing her the pastry whose ruddy crusts had begun to stiffen upon the touch of my cold palms. Without thinking, she took the soft pastry, continuing to stare at me. I had thirty free minutes available until the time of take-off. I stayed sitting next to her until the twenty-second minute before leaving. The minutes passed slowly.

After about twenty minutes I found myself above the clouds. At last a sense of peace came over me. A hot wave of heat washed over me and I had to take off my coat. Taking off my sleeves, I noticed noticeable grease marks near the right side pocket of the coat. Without my noticing, the old woman had wiped her hands from my clothes. I didn't want to think

that her greasy trucks would travel with me. I felt dirty. I quickly took off my coat, gathered it up and squeezed it into a big ball. I got up and looked for the nearest larger trash can. On the lid of the trash folder in large French letters was written: “Tu donnè un panier de basket”⁷.

My seat was stationed right next to the window. The clouds and my imagination made a pact of unity during the journey. How many people, places and moments have I left behind? The old woman, the collegium, the audience, Darian Trifunov, countless important and unimportant phenomena, concepts, persons and objects... Somehow accidentally and carelessly in the middle of my thoughts appeared the presenter who more than a year ago tried to slyly and promiscuously wage war with my ego. Festivals, political connections and promiscuous women await him somewhere. No one is waiting for me. No one except the world and the unknown background of the horizon.

Mi

¹Strong alcoholic drink.

²The word is coinage. I mean a military exercise.

³I don't know, if it was Blaže's or Foltin's Vezilka ringing in my head.

⁴Traditional macedonian food.

⁵Francis Scott Fitzgerald

⁶Umberto Eco

⁷score a basket, in basketball

God Laughs/Lies

By CL Bledsoe

Back then, everything was a dull blue, and we waited for orange like Christmas morning. Lemons were a treat for more than just dogs. We made bread from the bones of our enemies instead of handing them the leashes we wore around our necks. Time trickled through our fingers like cornmeal, as Mamaw chased us, trying to edge her bowl beneath. She'd eventually give up and send us for a switch. In school, she'd lettered in beating children. It was an honor to have someone care enough to hurt us. We thanked her, each day, for the welts. The sky rarely burned, and when it did, we blamed the French. Nights, we couldn't sleep, due to the crickets insulting our fashion sense. Sangy always said she could make friends with them if she fed them enough tobacco. They were trained better, we tried to tell her, but her toothless smile was between her plans and God.

Parallels (4)

by Alexander Limarev | digital manipulation | Siberia | 2023



A Grave Young Man

By Michael Igoe

Solid shock of hair,
above clueless eyes.
Combed with fingers
all four of his fingers.
Seeing the whole world
as something contrived.
Outnumbered in his favor,
he keeps things humdrum.
He pays the most attention
while at a family gathering.
Knows just a little,
of books he's read,
much he can't use.
Like fish in the swim,
he's got it all coming

There is a website

By Jeff Lincoln

There is a website
with the words of Kurt Cobain's suicide note
And it has an explanation
of what Kurt meant in his note
line
by
line
written by strangers
And I can't help thinking
It was Kurt's
foreknowledge
Of a world wide web site like
that
made his suicide
necessary

A BRIEF EULOGY FOR AN ATHEIST

By Bill Cushing

“Death is a part of life,” say the living, yet
many people will bear burdens to get
one extra day—one reason to admire my father,
a man whose creed rejected even the notion
of an afterlife, then turned down
a chance to go on since it meant
he’d have to exist unable to engage
with the company of people.

WE TOO ARE GODS

By Ikechukwu Iwuagwu

When your mind has captured her nudity laying supine on acres of encyclopedias, and your eyes only eaten her beauty in the parliament of imagination

You feel you've conquered her?

Wait till you see the fluffy clouds winking with silent lightning, and the growling of thunder marking the disappearance of weeping skies, or Palm fronds colliding in conspiracy, lured on by the billowing breezy beats of harmattan

Maybe when you witness the breaking of dawn heralded by tweeting of birds, crowing of cockerels and swaying of dew-laden grasses, or the descent of dusk marked by a deluge of chirping melodies from the larynx of crickets, and the moon's hide and seek game behind bamboo stems and giant iroko arms

Perhaps you might wait till you see maidens whose feet and ankles clad in beaded glory reaffirm their mastery of the alphabets in the throat of the drums or till you visit *Idanre**, the abode of Ogun, dweller of the hills and mother idoto's grotto, the abode of *Okigbo's*** iron bell and stick; nature's pillow.

Have your ears been littered with the trumpeting of elephants, roaring of lions, and chattering of monkeys in the safari? Or your eyes sighted antelopes priding themselves on swift slender hinds, darting away from preying predators?

Your ritual is a tapestry of awesomeness and intricate beauty, your rind, clad in splendour; alluring to a billion eyes

Oh, Mama Africa! Cradle of mankind!
Leopold spilled on paper, his witness of your black beauty,
our blackness, beautiful black coals.

*Igbo, hausa, Yoruba, Asante, Ewe, Fante, Twi, Massai, Himba,
Zulu, Khoisan, Ndebele, Samburu*** and yours*

We too are gods!

****Idanre hills is a beautiful landscape located in Ondo
state, Nigeria***

***** Renowned black poet of Igbo origin***

******Some tribes in Africa***

Two Crates Of Lager

By J.M. Summers

Two crates of lager, a pack of fags
and crisps to soak the lot up, and
wouldn't you? It beats sitting in
the traffic twelve hours trying to
get on a ferry, or to the coast, or
painting the fences and mowing the
lawn and getting the walls white-washed.
Others will spend it in church, and
didn't we used to have parades on Good
Friday, taking the cross through the
streets, sometimes with a real donkey
if you were lucky, and there are still
hot cross buns and chocolate eggs
though the churches are a little
emptier now, and some things are better,
and some things are worse, but look -
the moon rising full, and bloody, over
the mountaintop, near enough that you
might reach and touch and feel cold
too, realise the perspective the
distance makes, stripped bare by
the pale light it casts.
Uninterested. No, uncaring.

Junk Drawer

By CL Bledsoe

Being an adult is mostly
about filling up a junk
drawer and having too
much debt to ever repay.
I'm writing letters to all
the dead to explain why
I've failed them. A soy
sauce packet or old cable
in each. Mom, yours
will include the strawberry
jam and a list of all the times
I meant well. It's not so much
Jesus as his houseguests.
At least I've managed to keep
my name. To the critics—it
doesn't matter what I say.
They'll just be glad to receive
the mail.

Parallels (5)

by Alexander Limarev | digital manipulation | Siberia | 2023



The empty chair

By Helsea Ikwanga

Imagine wisps of grey hair in uneven tufts.

Imagine that man.

The boss.

The one who has my application letter on his desk.

I call him at 5:30 pm, awkward time to call, outside work hours. I apologize. Then, I introduce myself, or, say, I reintroduce myself. He does not recognize my name; he does not remember me altogether.

“You applied for a job?” he says. In fact, he repeats what I tell him but in second person and in question. He says, “‘a job’ is broad.” I specify that I applied for internship as a Lands Officer.

“I am in Blantyre,” he says, and in his assertive of voice, he makes Blantyre a heaven which should not be reached and which should not be bothered. With the fire of pain he inflicts in my stomach, he hangs the line. I want to remind him that he promised a feedback this week. When he does not pick up, I don’t call again. I know he is disgusted, he

should be. I also know he is busy, he should be. He is the boss, after all.

Imagine a picture of an overweight man I have not seen in four years.

The man in the picture is older than me. In fact, he is the oldest of all my siblings.

My dead brother.

This makes Cape Town a failed province. The killing of someone I know. My brother Phillip is shot in his head three times; he is helpless; he can't shoot back. He is the first in our distraught family to use a gun. I am proud but I am disturbed more.

My thoughts behave differently from a man who is bereaved, bubbling what could degrade the mystery of death.

“It is not that I want to work in South Africa, it is that I am desperate,” I muse.

But a fairly young reverend, in a black cloak and a white collar, intercepts the feelings.

“We suffer here but we are not unhappy,” the reverend screams. And with that powerful line, he yields a chorus of *Amens*. The reverend, to incite more intimacy, even mentions my name in his sermon.

“Don’t even think of going, Kipasamo,” he says as if he is watching what is in my brain, “You see how your brother was killed?” In truth, he is accusing my brother Phillip of killing himself. Or, in other words, he is calling a dead man a villain.

“I won’t go to South Africa,” I make up my mind right there, between my sobs.

After the sermon, we all stand up to sing Hymn number 66 from Hymns of Malawi. Our faces are somber, Mama still as inconsolable as ever before.

I say “rest in peace” to his coffin for being my brother Phillip’s final abode but I remember him for being buried without his dead body. Later, after our family has tried, we cannot reach our target because “not all of us are financially stable,” some of us argue. And therefore, there is no tombstone for my brother Phillip, even a cheap one.

Imagine two buttocks filling a swinging armchair in fresh morning air of a Monday.

Imagine a black suit and a white shirt and a red tie.

The boss.

He is in his imposing office, with an air conditioner to cool his elephant-like head.

The boss.

The man who has my letter, typed in font 12, Times New Roman, 1.5 spacing and printed. His secretary, a woman with a set of bad teeth, says he is engaged in a meeting, her boss, the boss.

I know the secretary is lying. She does not remember me, of course. I insist I won't be a nuisance. She ushers me in his office. I don't close the door because there is no instruction to that extent. I sit, though, when I am not told.

"You should not have come," the boss says, "Your letter is safe in my files' folder, okay?"

He adds that he will contact me when there is a vacancy. He lets me go. I look at his congested moustache through the louvered windows of the office. I don't wave at him when my gray eyes catch him stretching his hands down into his pants. Neither do I take an offer for a ride from a man on the M1 road outside.

"I will walk," I tell the man who looks like death. The man's car is as dark as he is, it is also tinted black. The car disappears into thin air.

Imagine an innocent citizen sitting, instead of sleeping, in the dead of the night.

Imagine how he complains of mosquito bite.

A night in police.

The things I do to get myself in a police cooler, I don't understand at all. Yes, I am a Malawian, not a violent Malawian, I clear what I believe is a misconception. The three police officers before me chuckle and clack hands like gossiping women.

The officers don't say, "It was a mistake, we are sorry."

The damage is done, though. I already know the secrets inside their cell: no water, no toilet. The consequence is that, one of the men in khaki uniform becomes my friend. His name is Kanduku, he should be older than me but not by a margin enough for him to be my father; his home is Mwanza District which is not here; here is Karonga District, by the way. He is married and "yes, I have a kid. In fact, three sons but don't tell my wife," he tells me before he bursts into laughter.

"It was my uncle," Kanduku says of how he got his job. He promises he will be my uncle when I need a shortcut to the police job, but later, it is not about asking for a police job why I need him to be my uncle.

“It is black,” I say, “And there are two SIM cards inside: Airtel and TNM.”

Kanduku is touched as a friend, he is also sad as a police officer. My phone is not recovered. The one I buy after the lost one is not stolen; I am robbed.

“They were four, I can’t remember their faces,” I explain—and this is recorded as a statement. I discover that I am not the only one here with a written report like this; we are ten or eleven. I also discover that all of us, the victims, tell of the same Shoprite route, and of the same four armed men, and of the same 7 PM time.

Imagine how happy becomes sad in a second.

Imagine how no remains no.

The boss.

I go after a few months.

To the boss.

To his spacious office. I strongly believe in my gut feeling; and I say to myself before I enter the office, “In half a year, there is a resignation and there is someone dead.”

He asks, “What is your name?”

His voice is warm but it turns grim.

He says, “It is too much, what is this?”

I tell him, “I am sorry” but it is his security detail that is handling my exit. When the whole of me is outside, the security detail bangs the pink gate, and says other words I don’t hear properly. I don’t have my machete, so I don’t retaliate. My shirt is still inside my trousers, tucked in like a capsule—and this is how I always look smart.

This is also how I meet a girl and we start dating. The girl is sixteen. I am thirty, I cannot tell her the truth. I don’t want to be older than how she believes I am. Our relationship lasts only a month because she does not understand what LOL means. My next girl is older. This girl wants to do her hair and her nails. She also demands at least a data bundle every week. Therefore, she cannot give me sex even when I have a condom and I am naked.

Imagine a woman who does not know her date of birth.

Imagine that woman, not too old, her gait not bent.

Imagine she is on top of a bicycle—and this is what she likes to do.

She is Mama.

Mama calls me in the morning. I don't answer because I feel a sense of obligation—and it is my inclination, the obligation. I call her, instead. She tells me about subsidized fertilizer. No, she has not bought, no, she won't buy.

“I will not die on a queue, son,” she says.

Then, it is time for death announcements.

“This man, he has killed his children,” she says, “Now he is dead.”

I don't identify with what she is saying let alone the man who is dead but I say, “What a shame.”

I don't say more because if I talk more, it will become awkward and it will turn to “sorry Mama, I wish I could help, I don't have a job, I don't have money.”

We talk again when her right leg is dead. I calm her down. I don't know if this is how to stop her tears.

“I will be fine,” she says, her line goes dead. I am relieved, to be honest.

Imagine a girl nearing thirty. Breasts not fallen.

Imagine that woman, beautiful and anxious but not for lacking suitors.

Imagine the woman, tall and light in complexion.

MG 1.

She is not Malawi Government number one. She is not the president of the Republic of Malawi, not His Excellency or Her Excellency. She is my real girlfriend—and I know exactly what I mean.

“You will be my wife,” I tell her and this is not even the first time. I put my long and uncircumcised rod where her wet crease beckons my attention. We are both standing in the shower, it’s our fun, it has been our entertainment. We are more than half a decade together, we laugh and we have laughed like this for seven solid years. In September, if we are still tied to each other, we will be eight years together.

We break up because she feels different in our sameness. I try to send her “I am sorry” but I don’t know where I am wrong or how I am wrong or why I am wrong. Of course, I am aware of some shades of my cheating but there is no evidence.

I see her status on WhatsApp. She is happy without me. I am devastated. I will send my essays of “we have come so far, reconsider, please do.” She will read, she will not answer.

Imagine a letter written to deceive.

Imagine a degree certificate that is well-whitened and well-laminated.

Call me supervisor.

I get a job. I did not study Malaria Prevention or Public Health. I have a degree in Land Economy with no descriptions such as ‘with distinction’ or ‘with credit’ but still, it is a bachelor’s degree. It cannot secure me a job like this. It lands me this job, though. I have someone who I bribe; that can explain but it does not matter.

“This is a temporary job,” I say. Mama does not care, she is happy for me, her only son now, her most important child now.

“Will you manage?” she asks a shocking question, of all questions I expect from her enthusiasm. There is maize flour, there is also a bed. She does not believe. She sends money. I am surprised but I am quiet.

I pay back when I receive my first wages. I even make it double. Because I am paid in American currency, I can even pay her in dollars but she won’t appreciate dollars as much as she smiles at the temptation of kwachas.

I am the Indoor Residual Spray Supervisor, my full title. Or call me supervisor. The first girl, who is one of my subordinates, says, “I love you too.” I still want other girls.

The good thing is, they also like how I am different from their boyfriends.

I celebrate when a female doctor—whatever designation she goes by—tells me I don't have Human Immunodeficiency Virus or, to make it clear, "you are HIV negative," she says. But I shade my face when my contract comes to an end. I convince myself that I am a man and therefore I should not cry.

Imagine a past that can't be.

Imagine how it stings my nerves, how it leaves me dejected.

Wishes are, of course, never horses.

I am bored. I miss MG 1 who is now my ex-girlfriend. I know she will not pick up. There is an elephant in the room, there are months between us, we have not talked. We talk. She is fine and how are you? She has been busy with work. How does it matter if she is single or if she is not single?

I stammer—and I have no more questions. I am also sorry for disturbing what she calls her peace.

That night, I open wounds. Memories flood my lungs: we are walking side by side, we are whispering, we are looking at

each other with our usual appetite. She is in my arms. But I know she is not here; she cannot be here; we cannot kiss.

I call her again on Valentine's Day. She seizes the moment with a pleasure of the girl I am familiar with and the girl I miss, too. I notice her indifference.

"I still love you," she confesses. We don't get back together. She is not ready, she won't be ready.

Imagine a girl you see born and you see growing.

Her English is not perfect, she likes speaking English, though. She infuses it with Chichewa which is also not her mother tongue, to start with.

My sister Eunice.

My sister Eunice. She is the youngest in a family of ten, a Ngonde-speaking family, now reduced to eight. My sister Eunice never calls; she never texts. When she says, "I need a laptop," I don't hang up. I know it is a necessity: not to continue talking. But blocking her feelings is a bad and cruel choice for me, her only brother who must step up to being her father, by the way. Is that not what Ngonde culture demands of me, after all?

I tell her, “Take care of yourself,” but she does not like to be advised too much and she is gone.

We meet when Mama is killed by a speeding lorry, her intestines strewn to shreds. I condole my sister Eunice because I know she needs commiserations more. I was seventeen, she was three when our father died; death of a parent must be new to her.

“Do you know that he died this month too?” I surprise her. It is a question and it is also a joke, it is foolish of me. A middle-aged man, who represents my late father’s family in his eulogy, reminds me of my foolishness, scolds me, almost slaps me.

“Whether your mother and your father died in April, this is not the right time to talk,” he adds—and he is right: we are at Mama’s funeral and I should be the last to disrespect her memory.

Because of the man’s derision, I don’t tell my sister Eunice other things, such as, my late father was a Catholic Church man, Mama was a Catholic Church woman too but only by marriage.

She is silent, then she is not silent, my sister Eunice. She talks to her phone before she excuses herself.

We meet where we can, we speak where we can, hummed conversations that dilute the brother-sister vibes from her silky voice. For example, she has a boyfriend but “no, he is just my friend,” she says, in a whisper that is too mute to be a whisper. The boyfriend is too ugly, does she not see for heaven’s sake? Then she is pregnant but she removes her baby. Until I ask her, “did you buy the book you intended to buy,” I don’t realize that she has used my own money for her abortion.

Imagine a man in an ocean of faces.

He likes this girl, he also likes that girl.

A chaos of sex.

A girl in a bus. We sit next to each other. And our love begins. We click because she is also heartbroken. When this is where she will climb down, I etch my lips where hers are. It is our first kiss, it is also our last kiss. I don’t even remember her name, not even her breath. I realize she is the girl I make love with in a tiny room before lights come back. It is her scarred hands, how I remember her. I know she does not remember me or she does not seem to remember me, but I pay for her startling service because this is how she earns her living.

I vow I must marry, rather than pay for take-away sex like this.

I don't commit to my own promise for long when another night deceives me.

This is yet another girl.

I discover she is thirteen when I ask her. I don't believe her lie especially when I pounce on her delicious breasts. She does not like this, my premeditated touch, my deliberate accident. I forget about her and I assure myself that I am okay even when I know I am not okay.

When we meet after the passage of a week, she says, "I don't have..." I prefer her mid-sentence rather than what could become a long speech because I can guess where she will end up to. She nods when I offer to buy chips for her. I confirm that she is older than her face. I sweat, she also sweats and she asks for water and she takes a shower. I don't ask who she is, who her parents are or where she stays. So when my passport is nowhere to be seen, I search where I know I won't find it.

Imagine a man, so undone and so uncertain and so desperate.

Imagine that man, no hair on top and no children on his back.

Imagine the man with luck.

That job.

Now I find a permanent job. I am not an accountant by qualification, but I pass the interviews with my clever tongue. My desk is not for one person to use. Neither is it for a gossip or two.

“...because we cannot trust your ability,” an excerpt of a letter, neatly folded for me to read, says.

I know no one can do everything at a filling station, not even the site manager himself. It is not an excuse, neither is it self-defense but for the first time, I decide to hire a lawyer. I only hope I will pay him even in case I lose the civil case in the Industrial Relations Court, but I am sure I won't lose for being wrongly relieved of my duties; I don't aim to be reinstated as the Site Manager of Walla Service Station; I aim to be vindicated.

In the court, the lawyer looks at me, but says nothing when he is supposed to bargain for my damages.

In my next job and in my next termination of contract, I depart with no drama; I chose grace, instead: there is no farewell party but I embrace the company's chief executive

officer. I feel her fire inside me. The problem is, she is married, unhappily married but still, married.

I should have saved my pension gratuity rather than bruise my sister Eunice's bundle of hope when I say, "I don't have." And the truth is, I cannot pay even a quarter of her fees balance. Even when she is withdrawn on academic grounds, I cannot host her because my small house is a sitting room itself and is a bedroom itself. But all this cannot justify why she swallows thirty tablets of quinine at once.

Imagine death, a sense of no sense.

Imagine a grip on your heart.

The boss.

The boss.

The man who must keep my letter; the man who should keep my resume.

It is inexplicable how I find my envelope in a toilet outside his office compound. I don't know how I get here, outside the office compound but I remember how the idea of being in the toilet haunted me. I go inside the toilet by impulse, rather than by convenience. My anus won't be silent or patient. I open and I enter and I close the door. I see the

brown envelope. The envelope is mine. I bought it with my life. The same A4 envelope. It is here. I find everything, too: my cover letter, torn into two halves. My degree, photocopied, one piece dumped into the depth of the toilet. The other pieces not dumped yet, but I know that soon they will also be gone.

When I am done and I am walking like a man again, that is when I meet a gossiping man. The gossiping man, in passing what flies like a joke, says he is dead.

I ask, “Which old man?”

It is the boss.

I don’t believe.

In asking for the third time to ensure I don’t misplace my smirk, I confirm it is indeed the boss dead, the man who should interview me: who should ask for my requisite qualifications, who should ask for my relevant experience.

“It is cardiac arrest,” the gossiping man says, “His heart has killed him.”

The boss is buried in a war cemetery because before his death, he wished for decent company—and he paid millions of kwachas to be accorded military respects. On his

tombstone is written, “JOHN KAZEMBE, BORN: 21/04/1946,” and other things I don’t care about. I subtract this year from 1946, I arrive at a negative answer; it does not matter, especially because I know he is dead. By calculation of age, he could be late Mama’s father or even her grandfather but the boss was still in office, not so energetic but strong enough to loathe my honest knock on his door.

When I am sure he will never come back, I feel anxiety when I see his office for the first time in what has been eternity. I learn he did not have even a diploma. This is why I make up to become him: the boss or even more than him. In my mind, he is dead and therefore, I reckon his chair must be empty.

“Come in, boss,” someone says or, I must say, I hear someone say. Should be my secretary.

ANSWERS

By Ayan Chakraborty

“Yes, I have been working. I shall call you back.” Somehow the bright screen of his cell phone shone through his eyes as he hung up the call. An intense tawny bright light. It rippled through his eyes, expanded on their quietness and stealthily took over his senses. The patter of large rain drops was a little unusual at this time of the year. It swept down the window glasses at Akash’s cabin; drying up in a few minutes before the swish of rain blew in again; often times to challenge the tenacity of the rattling panes.

It was late March; too late for western disturbances to affect Delhi, too early for the torrential rains of summer to set in.

The call was rather brief. Akash could feel that his voice sounded different this time. No, not the usual different. Not the heavy tenor he hears when his nerves are piqued, neither the one he abhors listening to with the weirdly elongated vowel sounds when he suffers from hesitance to speak. It wasn’t a work of his faltering seriousness like it does when he drawls through a monotonous PhD meeting or when he blabbers around a family function, looking out for a crafty exit.

Akash had braced for it. He had a habit of poring over the neatly cut and coloured catalogues in the library. His university, situated in the middle of a thick and rocky jungle, had a good repute for research and could boast of a stellar collection of books. Yes, intellect too. It had been five years already. Long, long five years! Quite enough for a boy to know what adulting meant or for a girl to spare battles in order to keep her ambition; for some of them to grow even sprouts of grey hair.

Time did well to him in this regard, Akash thought. He still felt young even if his myopic eyes weakened marginally every year. But his adulting was extravagant; too sure to just keep him within his books and thoughts.

The telephone call had, for long, been anticipated. To speak frankly, Akash had rehearsed these moments so much, so well in his mind; again and again. He knew he was the protagonist of this episode; obviously, he was the protagonist of all his episodes but he had never cared about them so much. This time it was different. It was just like his voice which had undone his usual panicky and celebratory self. It had a dread of his own calmness; ghostly, bizarre, silently cacophonous.

He had his roots stuck to a small town in western India. When he travelled back home in the third tier AC compartments of superfast trains, night hours used to amuse him. Can a train so full of people sound such ghastly quiet? How could the stillness of unknown villages look so lively from inside the train? Was it just the motion or was it the moonlight or the now largely electrified contours of the once crime infested routes? “*Avi sundarata!*” he often wondered; “May be this idea of life comes just from the crackling sound of the wheels, yes, must be!” With mechanics, motion and life directed onto one another, Akash could bother more about some other set of oppositions. A coach full of travellers---noisy, loquacious, indulgent, often impossible--- are all laid to rest now. As if exhaustion caught with them forever. Dead as in the grave. All those elderly bunch chasing their grand children or the young couples fretting at the risk to their privacy and the middle aged touring the country in groups, occasionally turning pilgrims--all those festal, mellow disturbances have steamed in an hour! Very dramatic, really; like a button violently pressed on in order to

ensure switching off lights in an instant. It was already like to be fixated in a moving morgue.

And then, you have the linen from the Indian railways. Real white shrouds. They could have produced better horror movies than those in the Indian cinemas, Akash insisted. He would wonder how it is to feel when dead. Or to feel alive amongst all that is dead. Isn't it really the same? See. it has to do with numbers; run into the minority and you are dead. Life, death mean nothing at all, never meant anything. "That's pure philosophy. Better than Heidegger's. Why didn't I pursue philosophy!" Akash used to wonder with repetitive sighs.

During day journeys, he felt uneasy. On one occasion, he wrote down a long facebook post;

"Train travelling has become rather frequent since the last month. At times, with some clamour around, there are certain urges of contraction twitching from within. I feel an instinct to distance myself from all that goes on, around. This distancing, I have realized, is not from apathy, disgust or intolerance. It is not remotely misanthropic. May be, there's one strange and elusive experience that comes with it. It is of hiding one's way, in order to gather more of the noise and the spectacle. Of feeling insecure, unstable, at times exhausted. It's more likely that there's an art to it. An art of imbibing stories, wills and whims, of navigating through acts of incoherence and small talks without actively engaging with them. An art of welcoming confusion towards one's own designs against these many voices. One great pain that feels like a push towards forceful expansion. But it's no science. You can't repeat it with the mind for it's sake every time you desire. Stability is a myth. But there's peace when you greet yourself in the process."

He felt like a genius.

When Akash was home for his vacations, Mihir had asked him if it were true the way Akash had said he felt intensely about things. “Is it disappointing to feel intensely?” “Not always” Akash smirked, “You can feel equally high. It is like a drug within you without being a drug.” Mihir hated Akash for his play with words. Can’t things be said simply? And, that too, by an upcoming scholar of history?

Akash had always enjoyed home. His home in Gandhinagar was relatively large; an extensive family who lived together within the confines of a larger three storey building. He was the youngest of his five cousins, the only male child in the house. For long, he had been made to feel privileged---the sole progenitor of generations to come; it will be for him that cradles will rock and lullabies sung. His cousins doted on him; their brother was a scholar, had never been unduly ill and was now a handsome looking man. What else is there to ask for? The only cause of disquiet had been his stubbornness to pursue an academic career when his parents had a thriving business. But that was a long time ago. Besides, many thought. Akash had the genes of a businessman, he could learn the ropes when the time would come.

His short trips to his home were during his academic breaks. It was a scene of chaos when he got back home and placed his blue trolley under the table of the larger living hall. Tears, laughter, sighs; and what not! There was feasting and fasting; sumptuous food for the family and *wrats* by his mother for his son’s long life. India had changed little, could change little of course, often not in a discouraging sense.

Akash was equally popular among his neighbours. His soft spoken tongue could debate but somehow never argue or so was the perception. He loved explaining to people why *dabeli* was a better snack than *fafda* or *kbandvi* and why Ahmedabad was more popular than Gandhinagar; so much so that it displaced the latter as the capital city from the common northern Indian psyche. “Nanku khuba ja avivyakta che (Nanku is very expressive)” had remarked the local tea vendor across the road, on hearing intense discussions almost regularly; all of which, with his inclination to exercise unbiased judgment, made more sense to him than any other over-hearer at the stall.

The Doshi’s Nanku seemed to have no *dosh*. He was a part of every other celebration during his teenage days. Be it the Navaratri *garba* or the *kai po che* clamour, he reeked of charm and invited quite the female attention any teenager would have loved to gather. He looked modestly built, had perfectly arched eyes and kept a balbo beard that he took special care of.

However, there was little that was heard about his affairs, or at least paid attention to, until one day when Aabha, a friend from his senior school, winced at that which was supposed to make her feel ‘emancipated’ but somehow didn’t.

“Do they teach about such things at your university?” Aabha had asked.

“Of course but you see there’s not much to teach, more to think, experience and apply.”

“ That’s why I saw pamphlets instigating agitation tucked in between your paper notes!”

“ They are book marks, silly. Agitation belongs more to the mind. It isn’t even instigation per say. It is a way to deal with things, to express.”

“ Haan, haan, all political sermons, Nanku. Mane salah na apo.”

“ Theek che, jao” lauged Akash without a dint of red.

Aabha couldn’t wait for long and attribute it to her curiosity or her beliefs, she went on to dispense with the repartee to his mother. Of course the intention was just this. But then who knows how conversations drag on during the slow summer afternoons? Aabha poured out all the words and the sense faithfully before Dhanya Devi who did not, this time, feel much graced.

“ What did you tell Aabha, Nanku? That every woman should work? That you do not respect women who do not work? You do not love me, Nanku? ”, she asked.

Akash was caught in a tight spot. “No I do. I love you. What are you thinking?”

“And respect?”

“Yes”

“Or it is just like your father who talks about both to the same.”

“They are the same, Ma”

“No. They aren’t.”

“But Ma, you never worked. You don’t know how difficult it is for women to go out and work.”

“Must be but it is even more difficult inside the houses.”

“Of course but because you have never challenged them.”

“Whom?”

“The system!” Akash responded promptly.

“What system? I don’t understand. It was your grandmother. It was also my choice to rear you up.”

“You think so, Ma. Of course you don’t understand.”

“Then who would have looked after you?” whimpered Dhanya Devi

“Nurses, may be.”

Akash was visibly running out of ideas.

“They don’t create bonds. You would have never known what it is to have mother’s love!”

“Common, Ma. Vat chodi do.”, said Akash, almost smarting.

The rifts grew and were poignantly displayed at dinner tables and in living spaces. And as every unattended rift expands, it slowly took its course to a chasm.

“The university is ruining him”, said Nanku’s father.

“I will talk to him, kaki. He is just having thoughts. He has just completed his masters. Leave it to me.”, affirmed Sarala, Akash’s closest cousin.

Sarala took her time to face Akash and it all turned a year for her to talk to a beaming doctoral scholar. Akash was home for

Diwali after jilting the Navaratri celebrations. It was for work that he could not return or may be, he was reluctantly anticipating his cousin's move. It did not really mean much to him to talk to Sarala but then, who wants to unlearn things that seem more redemptive, real and could, at once, also sound intellectual? It was like engraving deep in the ground with an art while floating in air.

“What is this Nanku? You hardly talk to me these days” blurted Sarala as he caught hold of Akash's hand. Akash, evidently, had made an abortive attempt to escape from his room when he saw his cousin move in from his side eyes.

“I know you have been talking to Ma for a year. It is she who argues and picks up a fight every time I evade her glances.”

“Why to evade?” asked Sarala, “It is okay to have views, to learn new things---not to insult your own mother.”

“I did not, Didi. It is just that she gets offended with everything I say. And what is worse, she wants me to follow what she believes in. My opinions are mine. I believe in them.”

“No, no. This is regular, Nanku, very normal. It is the generation gap, really. But you will also learn that things are not exactly like your classrooms and answer sheets or college campuses. A family life is about things that bind people together.”

“Bond is not bondage. I love you all but please let me live my life my way.”

Sarala's face flushed in mild shock.

“What is your way? Is it different from ours?” “Yes, very”. He responded.

“Now Nanku you must understand that you are growing up. We will look for a girl soon. Or is that you are in love with a working girl whom we not know of?” she insisted, “It will be difficult I know. You know our family. But I will try my best to convince them, I promise. I am on your side. You don’t need to look away from us.”

“ Leave it please, Didi, please.”

“Why, I am telling you it is okay to have a working wife or girlfriend. Tell me, I am more than willing to look for a girl who is ambitious. We will do it together. Okay?” Sarala looked for validation.

Akash’s eyes turned blank. He said, “It is not what you think Didi. I won’t marry anyway. This entire talk of a year is a farce.”

“What non-sense? Why on earth?” laughed Sarala. “You are still a kid. I know you were posturing.”

Akash looked different. Very different. Different enough to haunt Sarala that something, somewhere had not been spoken about.

“Su thiyu che?” (What is the matter?)

Akash’s face looked blue, darker than the sky.

“Tell me? Okay, it remains between us. Theek che?”

“ Didi, I did not want to say this. But will you support me please if I say it to you?”

“ Yes, tell me.”

“ I do not know how to say this. I love a man.”

Sarala was quickly transported into a dream she could not recover from; far worse than the one where she felt her miscarriage was unreal and her baby was giggling in her womb.

“ Don’t play the fool with me. I am your elder sister!”

“ I am not. I am gay, Didi. I like men.”

“Are you mad?”

“ No, it is biological. Social. Both.”

“Who says so? Those English movies and those books? I will burn them.”

“ Okay do!” Akash almost shouted in his baritone voice. “But this is me.”

“ Stop with your stupid hobby, that research. Get some sense, get into the business, get married. You will be okay. You don’t look that way at all. Be a man. It’s just a phase.”, her voice was redolent with authority.

“ So this is the real face that you people have been hiding. I will rather get death!” Akash rushed out with the room and left for Delhi in a day.

The following years were difficult to count. Anyone would have said that it was just two on every calendar but it was really twenty to feel.

Sarala did not keep the word with herself for even a month. She had rushed to Dhanya Devi and Pranad Kumar who were shocked, stuttered, crestfallen, unbelieving parents.

Akash had mostly avoided his home since, if he could call it one anymore. His relatives hardly knew about the particulars but had surmised the widening gulf between the Doshis. “Is it because of a Delhi girl?” many asked. The Doshis maintained silence more efficiently than any day of mourning.

Akash flipped through Anita Desai’s “A Devoted Son” countless times. But this time, it was beyond Desai too.

“ Sambhad beta, I am your mother. I have known you the most, since your birth. I have seen you playing with boys...dancing with girls. The crowd around you is not good. They are abusing you...convincing you to believe in wrong things. Shame! May they be cursed!” Dhanya Devi had scorned her fate. Her calls though regular, contained the same content and was progressively ignored or cut short.

“You are the only son I have, this family has. What about our future, your future? What about our progeny? What about our neighbours, our caste. Shame, shame! My business! Our business!” cried an exasperated Pranod Kumar.

“Think calmly. Who will look after you in future? Do not think dirty, Nanku. It is a disease and it is all about diseases!” pleaded Sarala.

“ You are the disease!” remarked Akash in tears. He had not visited ‘home’ for a year now.

Akash loved his library cabin and his room at the hostel. Till very recently, he used to scribble again and again; attempting poetry. Isn't that the only way out, Mihir had said? But Mihir didn't know that his way did not help Akash to come out.

Akash thought of the rail coaches at night. The three tier coaches. The moving morgues. Wasn't it the same feeling alive among shrouded bodies? Or dead between them in the day? The references for the minority? It's about population, time and space; it's about who owns them.

"Is it really my books? Are they lying? Am I not different really? But what does it mean to be different. Damn! It's me, the problem, philosophy. It's my love to complicate things." He thought repeatedly.

But isn't life just about that?

On other occasions, he could sketch a nude portrait, murmuring, "Am I lost? Have I not done enough as a son? Haven't I proved my worth towards my passion? Didn't I take care of them? Don't they love me? Didn't they love me? Do they love just themselves and seek it through me? ...

Will it always remain the same? Can one trait, just one, define my entire life? One which I didn't will by myself? Has it been this way always, everywhere? Should I just die and escape, once and for all?...

Are there answers at all? Is this why Socrates is loved now and hated at his times?"

But it was not Akash who died. His mother caught illnesses, unexplained and purely psychological. Akash had visited her but just for an evening.

His thoughts still wriggled through. “Should I get closer to a girl? Will that cure me? Will that cure Ma?”

He felt sick. Sick of himself, Mihir and the world.

It was February when his Ma had tried her last bit. “I will die, Nanku, come back and marry!”

Akash never responded. He did not know whose death to wish for.

It was March when she hung herself. It was the season of bougainvilleas on the campus. It was, however different this time, it had been raining at a stretch. As if, some word had travelled across distances and would not cease or seek closure.

Akash will call back once when he comes out of his work. He will move back, may be, in a day. He will speak much without an answer.

Forsaken Mind, Forsaken Body 1

By Shanta Lee



The Pendulum

By Rhys Hughes

Professor
Eugene
Ticktock Monkeysock

A cluttered room in a house, clearly the study of a scholar. The scholar in question is a retired professor, venerable but not ancient, with a short white beard and round spectacles. He is sitting quietly on a chair with his hands on his knees. He is waiting for something and has been waiting a long time. He occupies a clearing among the furniture and ornaments as if he is the defender of a redoubt. On the wall behind him is the face of a clock but with no hands. There is a hook just below the number 6. A minute passes. There is a rap on the door. He ignores it. The rapping comes again, more insistently.

PROFESSOR (glancing to the side): Yes?

The rapping resumes a third time. The professor leans forward.

Yes? The door is open.

He sinks back down into the chair, abandoning the effort to rise.

The door is open, I said.

A man now enters. He picks his way around the furniture and enters the space where the professor is sitting. He is frowning.

EUGENE: So there you are! And now I suppose you are going to say, 'Here I am', but that isn't an answer. We were waiting for you.

PROFESSOR: I was waiting too.

EUGENE: We were waiting for you. You were here all along?

PROFESSOR: I was waiting for the right time.

EUGENE: The right time for what?

PROFESSOR: The right time to come out and meet you.

EUGENE: But the meeting was yesterday! You are more than twenty four hours late. The meeting went ahead without you. It is over now. We simply assumed you weren't coming. And you weren't.

PROFESSOR: The meeting was an important one?

Eugene shakes his head, looks exasperated, laughs a little.

EUGENE: Not really. It was a banquet.

PROFESSOR: A banquet in honour of someone I know?

EUGENE: In honour of you. So yes. (Frowns) Unless you are someone you don't know. (Pause) And I wouldn't be surprised if—

PROFESSOR: If? If what?

EUGENE: If that was the case. If that is the case. If the case is open and shut. If the case ought to be replaced with a new case. They get battered, those cases, in transit and bits of them fall off. The handles separate from the body. Then they split open and everything inside—

PROFESSOR: Falls out? (And while Eugene nods) Books inside mostly, eh? Just a few clothes. A porcelain cat, a simple souvenir. Well, well, it can't be helped. I have been waiting

for the right time to set off. But as you can see— (He licks his lips and points at the clock face) My clock is broken.

EUGENE (staggered, clutching his head): Your block is crocken? What does that mean? Crocken! You mean that your block is croaked? How did it croak? Did it become a frog overnight, one gelid night, one foggy night, a frog? If not, what block are you referring to? The block that is exactly equivalent with your noggin? Or some other block, a maritime block, mayhap?

PROFESSOR. You misunderstand me, mister. Mister?

EUGENE (bowing awkwardly in the confined space:) Mister Eugene Axiom, your oldest pupil and youngest friend. It was I and no other, *no other I say*, who was the individual responsible, *responsible I say*, for gathering together a collective, *a collective I say*, in order to arrange a banquet, *a banquet I say*, in honour of an outstanding personality, yourself, *yourself I say*. And yet—

The professor waits to hear the conclusion of Eugene's speech but it doesn't come. Eugene has approached the clock face and is inspecting it. He raises his arms but doesn't touch it. He sighs loudly.

PROFESSOR: And yet, and yet you say?

EUGENE: You didn't turn up. You were here all along.

PROFESSOR: The clock is broken. I was waiting for the correct time to get up and go out and attend the event. But the correct time never came. I first had to wait for the clock to repair itself. Don't you understand? I relied on the clock to tell me when to go out, but there was a pecking order, or should I say a tick-tocking order, and waiting for the clock to get better took priority. I was waiting for it to heal itself. Then, and only then, would it be in a position to alert me to

the fact I ought to get ready and go out. (Pause) To the meeting.

EUGENE (gently): To the banquet.

PROFESSOR (nodding): In my honour.

EUGENE: Professor! Professor! (Sighs again, turns to face his mentor) These days are the new days, the days we are living in. The old days are gone for good. The present is here now. Clocks don't repair themselves. They need repairmen. They aren't like the clocks of yore. I mean, the clocks of your ancestors. Which were sundials anyway. The stick that casts the shadow falls over. But there's a flood and new sticks rush along the dry riverbed and one of those new sticks sticks in the place where the old stick stuck. The sundial is repaired. It has healed itself. But these new timepieces, these clocks—

PROFESSOR (amazed): They don't? You mean that futility is not an abstract idea? That it can exist for real in this room because of that wall, because of that clock high up there, those numerals, broken, broken!

EUGENE (boldly): Futility is not *just* an abstract idea.

PROFESSOR (meekly): I was waiting. I didn't know what the time was. I thought about asking a repairman to fix the clock. But I didn't know what time it was. The repairman might be shut for the day. His shop, I mean. Shut for the night. Maybe it opens again at 6:17 in the morning. But how would I know when it was 6:17? The clock is broken and once a clock is broken it seems it is broken for good. I mean, broken forever. It's not good. It won't heal itself apparently. I must wait until the decay of eternity.

EUGENE: If I was fortuitously a repairman, I would repair it for you.

PROFESSOR: Well, are you? Are you one?

EUGENE (pointing at an unseen object on the floor): What is that? It looks like a stuffed cat. I doubt it is a stuffed cat but it looks like one.

PROFESSOR: It's a handbag.

EUGENE (facing the audience and rolling his eyes): A handbag!

PROFESSOR: Yes, that's right. I obtained it a long time ago. I can't remember if it was a present or whether I purchased it with the coins in my possession, coins that undoubtedly filled the pockets of my trousers and tried to drag them down, those trousers, tried to pull them off. (Sighing) Exposed. To eyes, the wind, the chill gaze, the freezing breeze.

EUGENE (suspiciously): How long?

PROFESSOR: Less than eighteen cubits.

EUGENE: No. How long in time, in years? Not how long in length?

PROFESSOR: I thought you were referring to my trousers.

EUGENE (shaking his head): Do I look like the sort of man who would reference a pair of trousers? Do I look like? Do I look? Do I? Do? I was referring to that handbag, the handbag that looks like a stuffed cat, that looks like it but isn't one. How long ago did you purchase it, or if it so happens that you didn't purchase it, how long ago was it bequeathed to you?

PROFESSOR (lifting a hand): Permit me to think, to cogitate that!

EUGENE (almost whispering): Time, not distance.

PROFESSOR (turning to gaze at the clock): It was... It was... Some time ago, many summers ago... but how many? It's a tricky calculation... You see, my clock is broken and so... I don't know... Well, it's like this, no in fact it is like that... I don't know what the time is now... So I can't work backwards to the time when I was given the handbag, if it was given, or even to the time when I bought this handbag, if it was bought... It is futile.

EUGENE: Why does it look like a stuffed cat?

PROFESSOR (brightening): That's because there's a stuffed cat inside it.

EUGENE: You keep stuffed cats in handbags on a morning like any other in this town, a peaceful town, no different to any other town, a peaceful town, and on the floor it can be found, the floor of this room?

PROFESSOR (unabashed): That's quite correct.

EUGENE: Why do you keep a stuffed cat inside a handbag?

PROFESSOR: In order to hide it.

EUGENE: To hide it from whom?

PROFESSOR: From prying eyes, from suspicious minds, from other cats, from dogs and mice, from auditors, from streetcorner men, from neighbours who gossip and those who don't, from space monkeys and stellar flunkies, from spies and agents, from tinkers and tailors, from sages and

mystics and eaters of biscuits, from quislings and widows, from butterfingere Samurái. How should I know who else I am keeping it safe from?

EUGENE (nodding slowly): It's mostly theoretical then? Armchair?

PROFESSOR (vehemently): from my armchair, yes! From my armchair! There may be a man concealed inside it, that's why.

EUGENE: That happens. Not often, granted, but it happens.

PROFESSOR (abstractedly): The two legs of my trousers, the trousers I mentioned earlier, are like pendulums. When I wear my trousers, those trousers, the legs swing back and forth, back and forth, as I walk, like pendulums. And my groin probably tells the time as a consequence. I don't know. This is logic but logic isn't always very logical, I have found.

EUGENE: Now you are changing the subject.

PROFESSOR (vehement again): I am changing my trousers! (Pause) My clock is broken. I don't know the time. Everything else follows from that premise. The meeting was missed because of it and now you are here because of it and I am talking to you because of it and one of the things I am saying is this sentence itself, the sentence that begins 'The meeting was missed because of it' and goes on to insist that 'I am talking to you because of it'. The handbag contains a cat, a stuffed cat, and the handbag looks like a stuffed cat.

EUGENE: And why might that be, professor?

PROFESSOR (shrugging): I suppose it is hiding in plain sight. After all, would *you* look for a stuffed cat *inside* a stuffed cat?

EUGENE: Yes, I would. I believe I would.

PROFESSOR: Then you are exceptional in the things you say and the things you do and the things you think. My clock—

EUGENE: It is broken. If only I was fortuitously a repairman! But what is that? What is that in close proximity to the handbag?

PROFESSOR (looking): A shadow. It's a shadow.

EUGENE: But it's not the shadow of anything. I mean, it's not cast by anything. It is an independent shadow. A shadow without a caster.

PROFESSOR: Pollux is the caster. I mean, he is the Castor. I mean, he looks exactly like Castor. They were twins, you know.

EUGENE: I know what the shadow of Pollux looks like. That isn't the shadow of he. It looks much more like... like... like the shadow of Ticktock Monkeysock. He was ancient in the olden days. Yes, in the olden days he was already ancient. A legend speaks of a myth that is about a fable and in that fable there is mention of an old tale about a story that tells of a rumoured individual with the name that he has, and in fact he is that individual. Ticktock Monkeysock. And that is part of his shadow. How curious! How wild!

PROFESSOR: He sounds like a clock repairman. Ticktock.

EUGENE (nodding): He sounds like one, but he isn't one. Oh no. How curiously wild. The shadow is detachable? I suppose it isn't. But I will ask anyway. The shadow happens to be detachable?

PROFESSOR: It happens not to be. I have tried.

EUGENE: When did you last try?

PROFESSOR (glancing at the clock face on the wall): I really can't tell.

EUGENE: If I was fortuitously a repairman, a clock repairman... But the handbag in the form of a stuffed cat mustn't be overlooked just because of the shadow of Ticktock Monkeysock lying next to it.

PROFESSOR: You will go far in life, if you continue to live.

EUGENE: Thank you. Far sounds like a nice place. But we are digressing. Your lateness is excusable, your handbag less so.

PROFESSOR: Not my fault. My clock!

EUGENE (sympathetically): Broken, yes I know. Broken!

PROFESSOR: If you were fortuitously a repairman... But the handbag. I remember now! The stuffed cat ought to be inside the handbag but there was an accident. I recall an accident. Something happened, a power cut, confusion, seismic shocks and a virus. A lot of things got mixed up very quickly. The handbag ended up inside the stuffed cat. A reversal of order.

EUGENE: The handbag is inside the cat? I see, I see. But the handbag is shaped in the shape of a stuffed cat? So who can tell, who will know? There is no essential difference in a practical world, not in the sense of utility, no.

PROFESSOR: The cat and the handbag are identical.

EUGENE (turning to the audience): A handbag!

PROFESSOR: Alternatively, we may say that the handbag and cat are the same.

EUGENE (still facing the audience): A catbag!

PROFESSOR: I missed the banquet because of my clock. The clock is broken. But how did it break? That's the question we haven't yet considered. I believe that it was deliberately sabotaged.

EUGENE: Really? But by who? By whom?

PROFESSOR (making a vague gesture): The opposite of a repairman.

EUGENE: What is the opposite of a repairman?

PROFESSOR: Sir Namree Aper, that's his name. He's a rumour. He's a vision. He's the sworn enemy of clocks and his swearing is extensive. He comes from some antimatter universe that's immediately adjacent to an uncle-matter universe and that's the worst kind of all worlds. I believe this.

EUGENE: But do you have any evidence for it?

PROFESSOR: None at all. But the opposite of 'none at all' is Lla Ta Enon and that is the name of the king of the antimatter universe. I made all this up just now, but the opposite of 'made all this up' is Pusiht Lla Edam and she is his queen, a circumstance well attested where I come from.

EUGENE: If I was fortuitously a repairman, I would sabotage the sabotage of Sir Namree Aper. I would repair the clock.

PROFESSOR: How grateful I would be. I would gibber.

EUGENE: But the damage to the clock was deliberate. A crime! We need not just a repairman but an inspector, a police inspector, some officer who can consider the case,

investigate it, solve it. Sir Namre Aper must be brought to justice! And if it so happens that it wasn't he who broke the clock, then someone else should be brought to justice instead. And taken away from justice afterwards. And then brought back to justice a second time, just to justify the expense of the incident and experience. An inspector is required!

PROFESSOR: I wouldn't know where to secure one.

EUGENE: Let's consider the issues at stake. It just so happens – and this is truly a remarkable thing – that I am a clock repairman in my spare time. Or rather, that is my profession and I am only not one in my spare time. This is my spare time right now. But the clock is broken, so there is no time at all, which means there is no spare time. Therefore I am no longer in my spare time. Therefore I can't be not a repairman at this moment. Thus I am a clock repairman. At your service, professor! What may I help you with?

PROFESSOR (pointing at wall): My clock is broken.

EUGENE: So it is, so it is!

PROFESSOR: And you are fortuitously a clock repairman?

EUGENE (nodding): I am fortuitously a clock repairman.

PROFESSOR (weakly): Hurrah!

EUGENE: But there's a twist. There's always a twist. The only time there isn't a twist is when the twist has been unwound. But the only time there isn't time is at times like these, when your clock is broken. This means there is still a twist. I will tell you what the twist is. Ready?

PROFESSOR: As I'll ever be.

EUGENE: I may be fortuitously a repairman. I may be, yes, and I am. But what is required right now is more than a repairman. A repairman will possibly repair a broken clock, a clock rather like yours, a clock *exactly* like yours, in fact, but an inspector is needed too, a police detective. It just so happens that my brother is a police detective, an inspector. Imagine that!

PROFESSOR: Your brother is an inspector?

EUGENE (nodding vigorously, wincing as he hurts his neck doing so): Yes, that's right, he is. He can inspect things and if those things turn out to be cases he can close them, by which I mean solve them. He is an inspector. He might inspect a pain in my neck, for example, the *precise* pain that I have at the moment, and he will work out that it was caused by vigorous nodding, then to advance the cause of justice in the world, *this* world, he will conclude that the nodding is a felon, a criminal, and ought to be arrested and charged. He will arrest the nod. Certainly it might be argued that to arrest the nod, he will be forced to arrest the neck too, the neck that was the engine of the nod, even though it's the injured neck that is the victim here. Well, that can't be helped, sorry. (Thoughtfully) And there are other things that can't be helped. It's normal.

PROFESSOR (eagerly): What other things?

EUGENE: A man is hanging from a windowsill by his fingertips. You happen to be a concerned neighbour alerted to his plight. You take fright at this plight. It is a sight to behold, your fright at his plight! But it's not right to make light of the sight of your fright at his plight. With all your might, you rush to his assistance. But he is one of those things that can't be helped.

PROFESSOR: Why can't he be helped? Why! The poor fellow. Why?

EUGENE (leaning forward, tapping the side of his nose): Because he is hanging from his windowsill on the *inside*. Do you get it? Not on the outside, but on the inside of his room. He is less than one inch above the floor. If he lets go, if his grip relaxes, nothing significant will happen...

PROFESSOR: And that nothing significant can't be helped?

EUGENE (straightening up): You have understood perfectly, professor.

PROFESSOR: But your brother is an inspector?

EUGENE: Correct. He fortuitously is. And I am fortuitously a repairman. He is my brother. But guess what? (Raises a hand for silence) No, don't guess. No clock means no time, no time means no time for guessing. (Pause) So I will tell you myself, with my mouth. (Pause) Not with your mouth, you understand, nor with anyone else's mouth. Only my own.

PROFESSOR: That's not very community minded, is it? But it is bold and brash and quite original. I am with you! Tell me.

EUGENE: I am a repairman. My brother is an inspector. (Pause) It just so happens by some miracle of physics, chemistry or semantics that... Follow the logic, if you would, professor... It just so happens that the repairman fortuitously is also a brother. Let that sink in for a moment, for a minute.

The professor scratches his head methodically for ten seconds.

PROFESSOR: It has sunk in. You are a brother?

EUGENE (nodding carefully): I am my brother's brother.

PROFESSOR: Remarkable! Which means?

EUGENE: My brother is an inspector. I am a brother. Therefore I am an inspector. If I am an inspector, then my brother is a repairman. I am my brother's brother. Thus I am a repairman. But we have already established that I am an inspector. Therefore I must be both a repairman and an inspector.

PROFESSOR: Bravo! This is marvellous.

EUGENE (bowing slowly): I quite agree with your assessment.

PROFESSOR: Are you in agreement with it? Excellent. And if there was anything wrong with it, you would want to fix it, because you are a repairman. And if you fixed it badly, against the laws of proportion, you would arrest yourself, because you are also an inspector. (Pause) Do you think there's any chance you can fix my clock today? Without time I feel lost.

EUGENE: You are a broken man, professor. I will repair the clock and fix you too. Time will return to this study of yours in this house of yours in this town of ours in this land of ours in this world of ours in this time of mine.

PROFESSOR (nodding): In your own time.

EUGENE: Correct! See how efficiently I spring into action!

He hops across the floor to the wall where the clock face is located. He comes to a halt underneath it, staring up at it. He mutters and stands with hands on hips. It is an anxious moment for the professor, who cranes forward on his chair. But Eugene suddenly claps his hands, turns and looks around on the floor, making an inarticulate exclamation when he sees what he is looking for. He stoops and picks up an object, holding it high. It is the handbag.

PROFESSOR (turning to face the audience): A handbag!

EUGENE: That's true, professor. A handbag in the shape of a stuffed cat that holds a stuffed cat inside it. But not just a handbag.

PROFESSOR: I don't follow you. What else?

EUGENE (triumphantly): A pendulum!

PROFESSOR (turning to face the audience): A handbag!

EUGENE (shaking his head): A pendulum!

PROFESSOR (still facing the audience): A handbag!

EUGENE (still shaking his head): A pendulum!

PROFESSOR (with a great effort): A handulum?

EUGENE (considering the matter): That will do. Yes, that's good enough. (Pause) Now watch what I do with it. Watch carefully. No, on second thoughts, don't *watch* carefully. A watch is a small type of clock. And the clock is broken. I'm about to repair it. When it is repaired, you can watch it. (Pause) But it will be too late by then. I am sorry, professor.

He hangs the handbag on the hook protruding from the wall and then he sets it in motion, swinging back and forth. He stands back to regard his handiwork and the professor is also entranced by the spectacle. Both of them heave deep sighs of relief and contentment.

PROFESSOR: It's a miracle! Or else you are a genius!

EUGENE: Maybe it's a miracle that I am a genius. But I'm not a genius really. I'm a repairman and my brother is an

inspector. I am also a brother, which means I am an inspector, because my brother is an inspector. As an inspector, my duty is to decide who was responsible for breaking your clock. I think I know. I think he sneaked in here and broke your clock, but it was dark, it was night, he crept out and forgot to take his shadow with him.

PROFESSOR: You don't mean to say that—

EUGENE: I don't mean anything! I am not mean. But *he* is mean, oh yes. Ancient but not venerable, sentient but not prosaic, antiquated but not outdated, archaic but not homesick, topological and not impossible.

PROFESSOR (quietly): Ticktock Monkeysock?

EUGENE (shouting): Ticktock Monkeysock!

As if summoned by this wild shout, a figure enters from the wings. It wears the mask of a monkey and carries an enormous sock in its outstretched hand. Both the Professor and Eugene are alerted by the disturbance and turn to regard the approach of the figure. They are paralysed by the sight. The figure continues to walk towards them, extremely slowly, and the lights begin to dim. The lights go out at the exact instant the figure reaches the nearest of the two men.

TICKTOCK MONKEYSOCK: I am Ticktock Monkeysock. I am Micktock Tonkeysock. I am Sicksock Sonkeytock. I am Sicktock Monkeytick. I am every variation of every adoration of every alteration of every aberration. Yes, yes and yes again. I am Sickmock, Micktick and Kickcock. I am Flunkey, Bunkey and Hunkey. It is time, it is time, it is time. But most of all I happen to be Ticktock Monkeysock. Who are you? I am Ticktock Monkeysock. Who are you?

Lights Out.

Forsaken Mind, Forsaken Body_2

By Shanta Lee



CACOPHONY

By W Roger Carlisle

I am a divorced father who believes in second chances.
My 35 year old son and I lie in the darkness of our tents,
while
katydids, crickets, tree frogs, grass hoppers, locusts
lull us to sleep with a cacophony of sound.
I remember my son shaving at age four with his plastic toy
razor,
real shaving cream, and no whiskers. I was in hurry then,
desperate for instructions on how to be a father.

After a life of excessive work, I have finally found time to
listen.
I'm tired of trying to explain myself to everyone.
These purposeful tunes are not played to justify my selfish
pride. Even if I could seek these players, it would be
a gift I don't deserve. I find myself melding into a harmony
I can't explain, wishing I could tell this chorus
how much I am enjoying their concert.

We lie together on the ground sharing our love silently by
osmosis.
We listen to the crickets clicking rhythms, insect fiddlers
strumming songs,
insect legs cleaving the air into millions of pulsing vibrations,
screeching stridulations of these pulsing band saws,
immerse ourselves in the peace and order of these dancing
fireflies,
find connection in nature's sounds, relax into new rhythms,
rest in the grace of the world.

Sunsets

By Adam Barentine

What is the velocity required to cross
the Pacific Ocean in a perpetual sunset?
Relentlessly sailing forward into
pastel skies of an impossible blend.
The deep blue of night growing warmer
as you look west into the infinite distance
between here and the horizon.
That wide-angle line always miles out of reach.

I hear the spirit of my grandfather
in hues of red and violet.
A voice heard too long ago to remember
yet ever present in the dim and
dying glow of twilight.
His inflection emphasized by a flash
of silver light reflected off each crashing wave.

His message is one of eternity
measured on a scale incomprehensible
to any being still bound by the laws of gravity.
I recognize his words as English
but cannot decipher any meaning.
Blindly searching for context,
I hear a tone of somber optimism
caught in the ocean breeze.
It speaks of home
but can only be heard by those
who do not require anything
as frivolous as directions.

Wailing Roses in Sudan

By Abubakar Terkimbi Saidu

After the boom! Boom!... of the bombs,
We are bathed with the blood being spilled!
And the thick and heavy dust
From the boom! Boom!... of the bombs
Comes depositing on us, and the blood
And the dust caking; caking our petals,
And locking the petals for good!
Making us feeling not the sun's rays again!
Making us feeling not the breeze again!
Making us feeling not the sky's tears again!
When the sky is crying due to our caking!
Sudan! Sudan! We are living dead!
When will this boom! Boom!... of the bombs be over?

Forsaken Mind, Forsaken Body_3

By Shanta Lee



When the sky Weeps...

By Abubakar Terkimbi Saidu

When the sky weeps, it clatters our roofs,
Clattering it like the clatter of horses' hoofs,
And sending the rhythm that feeds our soul;
As the legs are trapped indoor and later go for stroll.

When the sky weeps, it softens the caked earth,
Softening and giving the caked earth a fresh breath;
The fresh breath making plants to be greener,
Greener, greener, greener till November.

When the sky weeps, the weather is chilly,
Chilly and bringing cocooning willy-nilly;
And rotten rubbish filling the gutters start to flow,
Flowing and swimming in the gutters as they go.

When the sky weeps, weeps and weeps for hours,
It destroys the farms and the homes of ours,
And so also the lives of ours in the destruction;
Leaving the pages of our heart with maintains of frustration.

The Cyrenian

By Henry Vinicio Valerio Madriz

Born as a slave, son of slaves for generations, in an inhospitable barren land, Simon opened his light brown eyes for the very first time on a typical hot sunny day within the walls of Cyrene City. He didn't cry, maybe because Simon didn't know anything about the workings of his world. He just frowned due to the sunlight. His mother bled to death in childbirth.

"Back to work", the master ordered. "No time to waste! There's nothing else you can do. I'll take care of her body...", he said. "Hey, little bastard! You cost me a great slave... I don't think you'll be an as good slave as your mother." The master added while holding the baby in his hands.

"Simon is no bastard! He has a FATHER, he's MY son... my SON!", Simon's father protested. Fatherhood is a joy and a privilege, and it should be an honor, even a slave understood that concept.

"Quiet! You insolent and ungrateful son of a bitch. Your son is my property, you idiot. All of you belong to the Vesta House, remember it and act accordingly!" The master stopped the rebellion. "Is that his name? All right! Then, Simon you are. At least, the gods favored me with another slave, not big losses." The master made sure Simon was fed by another slave, whose child had died some weeks ago. Motherhood cannot be taken away under any circumstance.

The master stayed for 2 more months to finish his regular trade there. After buying some more slaves, his caravan was on the way to Bethabara City, where the master had his main business and house.

In Bethabara, Simon's father also perished of hunger and disease (too weak to stand) since the master punished him for speaking out -something forbidden by the Roman Empire.

Slavery is a hungry lion that presses and suffocates your throat while it consumes your life.

Simon had nothing at all... but even nothing was taken away from him, a slave and an orphan.

“Take the Cyrenian baby slave, now it’s your responsibility. Make sure he’ll survive, otherwise, you’ll regret it”, the master commanded another female slave, an old one.

When Simon turned 5, he started working by carrying water from one place to another, giving water to all slaves: sheep and goat shepherds, farming and maintenance workers, and housekeeping servants. Thus, he became the water boy... until one day when his master had to pay a small gambling debt. The dice were rolled, and Simon lost... lost?!

“You can take Simon, he’s young but strong.”

“Way too young for my taste!”

“Come on, don’t be difficult! You know it’s a great deal. You didn’t get your money back, but you’ll get more than what I owe you; besides, this kid will make you rich one day.”

“All right, I guess you’re right. I’ll have him in my house.”

Vesta House was a soilless place where roots grew up empty. As a result, Simon had no memories from there, nothing good nor bad worth enough to remember. So, he would miss nobody, and Simon wasn’t going to be missed by anyone. In addition, he had no belongings to take with him, just the rags he was wearing... he was barefoot.

Simon’s new owner was an artisan, a potter; and, as an artisan he was, somehow, the new master realized Simon was a skillful person. Therefore, he asked the head potter to teach Simon everything one should know about pottery. Consequently, Simon learned how to differentiate the clay conditions in order to give it the best treatment and use. He also learned, with time, how to work and mold it in full detail -the same way life molds individuals to fit the system. The new master thought Simon was about to give him lots of money, as the former master affirmed.

At the new house, Simon knew love for the first time.

Although the artisan was a just master, there was something wrong with that house that disabled him to have children. His firstborn was a gentle, handsome, and brave young boy; however, he died at 14, when he was riding his Arabic white horse and a desert horned viper frightened the animal -the horse reared and fatally threw him to the ground.

The sad mother saw her firstborn in Simon the day he was brought to the Abadi House, and, instantly, loved him (a mother never forgets: joy or pain dwells in her heart and mind forever). That was the reason why she asked him to help her daughter after working hours (that were reduced). The new master noticed it and felt moved. He said nothing but sighed - he also loved his firstborn with all his heart, his son was his pride. The new master also remembered his 3 dead children - his wife was unable to terminate her pregnancies. Thus, both made sure Simon felt comfortable at their home... and he also felt, somehow, he was appreciated, even loved. That feeling grew up as the strongest loyalty ever, even love.

Because of the firstborn's death, Miriam became the only child in the Abadi House. She was adorable, extremely beautiful, but a sick child. Miriam was the light of her mother's eyes, her heart. The artisan didn't understand it, but Miriam was the equilibrium of his house, the anchor of humility that tied him to the ground, not losing his humanity.

Miriam accepted Simon promptly, they became playmates right away, close friends that experience life together. By the time Miriam was 13, Simon was 15; and love was reborn in his heart so much that overflowed to be born in Miriam's heart, too. Love always finds its way... it's a sweet gift from destiny.

"A slave must also have a soul because my feelings for Miriam are flowing within and throughout my soul." It was a wise conclusion for such a young person. Magnificent lessons can be learned at any age.

Both parents noticed how Miriam and Simon's relationship grew up strongly and purely. Miriam used to take Simon by his arm as they both walked in the garden every

afternoon till the sunset. She always claimed she felt weak and needed the extra help. Her parents also noticed how much her health had improved, her asthma spam had completely disappeared. Simon was not only a blessing for the Abadi House but also for their beloved daughter.

However, nothing lasts forever. Sometimes happiness is destroyed by selfishness, arrogance, or ignorance; sometimes, by social rules that break individuals' will down.

The master was a good man and sincerely loved Simon as his own son; nevertheless, his daughter couldn't marry a slave, even if he had freed Simon.

Miriam's parents had tenderly transformed the desert land into a paradise, but sadness showed up in the master's heart as a two-tailed scorpion that bit it many times a day. His mind worked day and night, night and day; but the master found no way to solve his predicament -he didn't want to break both youngsters' hearts. And even if he had done it, he would have broken his first.

Heaven always answers prayers, especially the desperate ones; nonetheless, sometimes, prayers are answered by hell...

One morning a high Jewish priest's caravan arrived in town, asking for some clay crock pots, soon he was told about the master's pottery workshop, so, the priest headed to the store.

"Thanks for your service", the priest said dryly after purchasing.

The master just smiled; he knew that kind of person.

"What about the boy?" The priest asked with interest.

"What about him?" The master asked back.

"Is he your slave? I happen to need some help. If he is for sale, he'll become my servant. Quite an honor! Don't you think so?"

"He's not for sale..."

"So, you want to raise the price... it's OK", the priest challenged.

“Allah must have listened to me”, the master thought and expressed: “Don’t misunderstand me, it’s not so. Never mind!” The master tried to explain.

He remembered his wife and daughter were inside the house; suddenly, he had a plan.

“The boy will be your servant for free...”

“Really?!”

“Allow me to explain myself, please. As I said, the boy will be your servant for free if, one day, you let him leave your side whenever he’s ready to do so. I’ve been planning to free him soon (the master gave a scroll to the priest). You are here... it’s not a coincidence! It must be done! You are a religious authority, and that fact makes you a man of faith and justice, social justice, so you understand my words. Just promise not to tell him anything we’ve spoken...”

“The Yahweh is my witness. You have my word.”

“Simon, come here!”

“How can I serve you, master?”

“You’re leaving immediately. You’ll join the priest’s caravan to help him during his journey.”

“I don’t understand, master.”

“There’s nothing to understand. Do as I said.”

“Come with me, lad”, ordered the priest. “I’ll explain it later on.”

Simon looked in the eyes of his master, he couldn’t read them; looked at the house through the workshop window, no Miriam... He thought it was a task, not a final goodbye.

So, the caravan left and Simon with them. His departure caused endless tears at the Abadi House.

Simon didn’t do much that day, he merely ate lunch and supper, and went to sleep. The following early morning, the priest made him do some caravan chores.

“Now that you serve me, I’ll tell you the way we’re going to work. I’ll teach you a great deal, too. You’ll see...” The priest explained.

Simon said nothing.

“As soon as we arrive in Jerusalem, you will be instructed about the synagogue rules and routines. You’ll be also taught about some religious matters. It will be a great honor for you, Simon, right?”

Simon offered a silly smile.

After a few days, they arrived in Jerusalem. And Simon began his new routines. Soon he discovered the power of religions... but he didn’t want to be part of it. Besides, his heart still lived in the Abadi House. He understood by then that religion could have 2 faces: spiritual high instruction ruled by God or an abstract distorted substance that poisons the soul until it dries up in hell.

“How many lashes, my lord?”

“It was a minor offense; he has a virgin back... just 10.”

“As you command, sir.”

Simon was punished because he withstood to go along with the priest to deceive some members of his congregation - as the rest of his servants and some colleagues used to do. The priest was true, it was the first time Simon experienced an act of cruelty.

“Master? Did you call for my presence, sir?” Simon asked while coming into his master’s chambers.

“Yes, indeed. In fact, I took a bath and I’m getting ready for you... did you take a bath as I ordered?”, said the priest.

“Yes, sir, I did.” Then Simon approached his master’s table on which there were many documents. One of them called Simon’s attention; he recognized the Abadi House’s seal across the opening of a scroll. Simon grabbed the scroll and put it inside an old satchel that was on the table too; he didn’t know how to read but it was his, a link with the only home Simon has ever had. He thought about it for an instant, everything was clear in his mind. He was leaving the room when the priest showed up... the master noticed the scroll inside the satchel.

“I understand. You have made a decision. All right. You are no longer my servant... Mm... this changes everything. Let me think... Tomorrow you will serve Asher, an old friend of mine, who happens to be in town. He is heading to Joppa Seaport City with his caravan. I believe that will make you happy. Leave now. I’ll make all the arrangements. By the way, you can keep that satchel, you’ll need it.”

The priest never tried to retain Simon; he respected the artisan’s will (the boy wasn’t of any use for his purposes anyway).

It was a long night, Simon saw a tied camel trying to reach some water, he felt pity for the animal, and, as the water boy he was once, he helped the camel.

“Listen, don’t touch my animals.” A tall strong man ordered.

“I beg your pardon for intruding, sir. I didn’t mean to cause any harm.” Simon replied.

“Mm... I believe the camel likes you. It seems to me that you are good at animals, you have a connection with them”, the tall man observed.

“I don’t know about that, sir.”

“Forgive my lack of manners. My name is Asher, son of Isaac, son of Caleb. I am the master of this caravan. And I believe you’re my servant now.”

“That’s what I was told, sir.”

“Fair enough. Get some rest. We’re leaving in a couple of hours.”

Years passed and Simon became a young man... and Asher’s right hand, his skills developed, too. Life was not a bed of roses but a good one; however, his heart still was living somewhere else.

One ordinary day, on the way to Antipatris City, the caravan was struck by some mercenaries (Asher was known for transporting valuable goods). It was a bloody battle; fortunately, Asher’s caravan was able to repel the attack. Simon was a hero on that violent day.

“I guess I’m getting old... and I guess now I’m in debt with you. Thanks for saving my life.” Asher thanked Simon.

“The kid is a man now”, an Asher’s slave concluded.

“You have my gratitude for always.” Asher finished his talk.

“I only did my duty, sir. Back to work, right?” Simon remarked.

Asher smiled, the young man was an excellent servant and a better person. “You heard the man... Move! Many things must be done: check the camels, the number of men we lost, what about the merchandise? Water?”

Simon, and the others, fought bravely. And, when 4 mercenaries broke through the barrier, he was able to stab and kill one of them immediately, to grab and pull another one against the supply wagon (the man was knocked out), and to strangle the third one when he was trying to stab Asher in the back while he was fighting the fourth man. Simon had become a strong tall man, indeed. He truly appreciated and admired Asher, a man of honor, and learned plenty of qualities and virtues from him. Quality and excellence can be developed or taught but never bought, stolen, or feigned.

Once the caravan arrived in Antipatris, Simon was in charge while Asher was checking if any merchant needed a caravan back to Joppa. By doing so, Asher was told someone was looking for a camel, and the rich person went to his camp; so, he went back there.

“I lost my camel, it was an old friend of mine, its time came to an end... We’re going to Nazareth.”

“I see. I’ll give you one of my best animals”, Asher made the deal.

“I am very thankful.” The foreigner said.

“Nazareth, huh? Would you be so kind to do me a favor that will favor you?”

“If it is in my power, I’ll be more than glad to help you.” The rich visitor said kindly.

“Thank you, sir. Can you take this fine man with you? He can serve you well. He’ll be very handy.”

Simon was shocked because he thought Asher was satisfied with his work. Asher stared at Simon and read his thoughts and continued his speech.

“Simon, think about it... Nazareth is very near Bethabara, where your heart is. Please, brother, accept my offer.”

Simon understood his offer and nodded.

“I’ll take the camel and the young man, then.”

“Sir, you won’t regret your decision, this man understands animals.”

“Well, camels and horses, not elephants”, Simon claimed.

“Melchior, we need to leave. It’s getting late.” The 2 other travelers said.

Everybody said goodbye and left. Asher’s caravan returned to Joppa and the new masters (3 of them), Simon, and some other servants headed to Nazareth.

“We’re coming back from Jerusalem, have you ever been to Jerusalem, Simon?”, one of his new masters asked.

“I was there for a very short time, sir. I didn’t see much of it. As a slave, you cannot visit places...” Simon walked with his head down.

“Slave! Huh?!” The 3 masters look at each other. “Then we are glad you joined us, a new beginning is waiting for you, you’ll see, He will give you a new life.” The 3 masters smiled, then laughed. Simon didn’t understand who they were talking about.

On the way, the 3 outlanders taught many things to Simon about science, real religion, values, beliefs, commitment, and charity for others. They were extremely wise.

“I’ve noticed you are following that bright star. We must be near.”

“Smart boy you are! This is our destination”, said one of the masters.

They kept moving for a while until they saw the light beam settled on a small shelter. The masters dismounted, took some things from their luggage, smiled, said nothing, and came

into the shelter, showing a deep reverence. Without knowing why, Simon followed them. He saw the most wonderful scene ever seen: a fine father, a loving mother, and their radiant newborn child on hay, surrounded by some animals, neighbors, and light, lots of calming light -even though it was dark outside.

After spending some time with that family and giving the family some presents, the 3 masters came out of the shelter and listened to Simon.

“I really don’t know how to explain this...”

“Go ahead, lad.”

“I know I can’t buy my freedom, but I want to stay with this family... I have... I have nothing to give as a present, like yours, but I want to give myself to them. I just feel it deeply...”

“Simon, we understand. You are no longer our servant. Now you serve this house.” The masters agreed.

That was the greatest news ever for Simon. However, he was accepted but never treated as a slave or even a servant... The family understood God was providing different means for their newborn child; hence, Simon helped the fine father with the carpentry and the product sales, the loving mother with the house chores, and the children with whatever they needed. It happened that Simon served that house for 9 years... till the day the Firstborn read Simon’s Abadi House scroll and explained to him he was a free man. “Little Master, are you sure? Little Master, you’re telling me... I’m a free man!” It was not a surprise for him since, somehow, he knew it, the Firstborn had given him peace. Simon expressed his will: to continue his serving. “Little Master, yet I want to stay at your side.”

However, the fine father told Simon he was an excellent salesperson, so he can be a great merchant, and he could help them that way. And so, he did. Simon’s reputation as a just man made his way: he started to trade the community’s products to other regions. Soon he became a rich man and

established his own house. But something was missing. He went to Bethabara to pick his wife up.

Misfortune came to live in the Abadi House. The old master -the artisan- and the mother got sick (probably their hearts couldn't bear the pain of letting Simon go). The sales went down little by little. The Empire took whatever was left at the workshop. Miriam dedicated her life to taking care of her parents. They were about to lose their home when Simon showed up.

“Can I take you to Nazareth? A new home is waiting for you there...”, Simon begged.

“Your master was right: you are making me rich again”, the artisan sighed.

And so, they did. In their new home, they had the time to catch up with their lives and to be happy again. Simon told them everything that happened in his life and the last House he served for.

When the Firstborn became a man, Simon's family and house followed His precepts. Simon was so proud of the Firstborn, he heard the news, that the Firstborn became a great rabbi. On the day before the Shabbat, Simon, a middle-aged man, was walking Jerusalem streets to find his beloved little master -a grown man then- to invite Him home when he saw the priest and former master, the old man recognized Simon immediately.

“You're here. I thought you left this city forever. Never mind. I have some business to take care of at this moment. My people are waiting for me to sentence a false prophet who I captured last night.” The priest said surprisingly and left. Simon couldn't say a word -didn't know what to say.

Simon kept wandering... after a couple of hours, a crowd filled the streets and squares of the city. “What's going on?”, he thought.

Simon got stuck among all those people, he was trying to break free when a Roman centurion told him:

“You, come here!”

A caligati took Simon by his arm and pushed him toward a bleeding man carrying a heavy cross.

In the beginning, he didn't recognize his little master and refused to help (Simon has always avoided violent acts and trouble).

“Help Him. Carry His cross.”

Simon obeyed. He approached the bleeding man. While taking the cross, Simon saw the man's face. He couldn't believe his eyes! He didn't know what to do or say, he just said:

“Little Master, let me shoulder your burden.”

Principalities

By AE Reiff

These are the garments we wear on this descent into the Taurobolium, Behemoth, Leviathan and their colonies. Taking the copy therefore herein translated from notes unfolded from patched and arbitrary custom, condensed from words substituted in its style, with other languages added with homonyms, the writer intends it may really be in some measure a translation of his own hand. Writers pretend to be editors so it may really be this is a translation, even if from the English. Commas and periods deviating from roundness are judged, if any, as comma. Exclamations are taken to the nearest of unequal size.

Samples could be offered beyond the style of the waterways and uplands of the principalities of New Philadelphia. Etheric truth and facts, people like ourselves between this world and the next used to say when the ships pulled in, Welcome to Philadelphia. While we translate the word *bar* in the phrase *shor habar*, a phrase, meaning “ox of the wild,” the word better signifies “wide open spaces” or “outer regions.” In another sense, which is “pure,” as in the verse, “One who has clean hands and a pure [*bar*] heart” the idea is the Messianic *shor habar* associated with the righteous worships the Lord of Lords through meat (*shor*) and the hot-blooded passion it engenders in a manner which is pure and refined (*bar*), which intention is to refine and elevate the physical world and corporeal existence—symbolized by meat and wine—and unite them with the spiritual source, similar to the effect of the holiday sacrifices of joyous peace-offerings consisting of meat. It would be a mistake to assume those land righteous who migrate the seas, who worship with vigor, eating meat and rejoicing in it, reflect gluttony or pleasure in worldly things per se. Their joy is in God, and their passion is inflamed in the performance of His commands.

Were this a version of that scroll Jeremiah wrote about the fall of Babylon and threw up into the Euphrates, Euphrates here would be internet *eviathan*, Babylon that complex of cities, states and nations that conspire against the Lord and his anointed and Jeremiah the composer in each version of this making clear. But there is another book that a king must write for himself in the presence of witnesses, readers, being a personal copy of faith to read all the days of his life, to learn to fear of the LORD his God and carefully observing the words of its instruction and statutes.

We write for ourselves a own copy of the Word, take it with us as we walk along the road and bring it back with us. When we sit it is with us, when we eat it is before us to read therein all the days of our lives. We write it ourselves. Now therefore write ye this song for you (*Deuteronomy* 31.19). This word is the amulet of arm and frontlet for face, buckled around the waist, fitted to the feet, a shield, a helmet and a sword, wherein we walk these paths of the highway of Messiah's return. "He has shown to me the path of life. I have set God always before me, surely he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. And in this the prince is educated" (*Psalms* 16.8. Levinas, *Beyond the Verse*, 180).

Such righteous worship with vigor, but rejoicing in it does not reflect gluttony or even pleasure in worldly things. These gobbets are made of 5 million diamond facts along the thirteen Balsam rivers, four hidden, nine revealed that flow through the grass of the thousand mountains. The faith of Water however worships in ways that are not apparent, through devout intention to effect the spirit. Land faith serves openly, focusing on performance in the physical world of the joy that comes from the manifestation of "walk in the light of Your Presence" engaging the physical world as Sages have taught joy. But it would not be possible to "touch" through physical worship were this not facilitated by the

purely spiritual worship at the first. Such hidden saints facilitate linkage of the created worlds with the Blessed, intercessors likened to fish concealed by the sea, found in every generation to traverse great distances with one powerful motion from place to place, so the righteous likened to fish reach spiritual heights in a single go. The sea-righteous characterized by coolness and calm are not held back by the need to elevate the physical world or express emotions, to accomplish the spirit. Like swimming and of course that means sailing, crossing waters as all immigrants have done, the sea voyage, the crews, passengers, food, health of all aboard much involve this faith. Both types, sea and land shor habar, practical-action-on-solid-ground, symbolize earth and the sea in their mountains, valleys and rich diversity of plant and animal life, expressed in the teaching, whatever there is on dry land, there is also undersea, but always before that, as now, there is a Messianic faithful of both.

If we speak in understatement to soften the recognition everywhere of these echoes of our past home, where myth was as real as a government requiring ship lists and oaths of allegiance as in old Philadelphia, this writing exists between this world and the next, where, as they used to say when ships pulled in, Welcome to Philadelphia. Worship in speech of things never quite expressed, poured over head in burial that life would never end, made single, made one, found complete in the Μόνο ο Ιησούς inscribed upon our hearts, in fact the Great Morning transformed to the epitome of all beauty, and of all joy, the arousal of joy and fiery passion in worship cannot be hurried. The deeds, the commandments must actually be done, emotions experienced; the world actually refined.

The Land-righteous engagement with the physical as the Daystar rises, admits only those who enter. Such emblems already create a Consolation that will show the unity of

the righteous of both sea and land sorts in the contest of the Messianic future. Both forms of worship are necessary and complete one another to a whole. The highest compliment of these is to practice the difficulty of living in two worlds spiritual and physical at once. That on land do not see directly into the spiritual required in sea. Back places merge where one as likely to see a robber as a friend, which is a nice way of saying that if an Adversary took all these forms in the physical and spiritual, so also did the Friend.

If you would like to know further these mysteries, the revelation is in words which even when directly apprehended must still be expressed. To directly apprehend, any intervention between the mystery and the soul is deception. The mystery must be seen naked. It has much to do with boring a hole in the lob of the ear and pinning it to the door. It has everything to do with hearing the sound thereof, as one born of the spirit, or as one says in another place, he wakens me morning by morning, he wakens my ear to listen as one being taught. That is why he says, further, I have more insight than all my teachers. You can no more transfer this by words then you can know life without living.

Put on the ephod, the Urim and Thummin, yes and no, but to know the voice you want to wholly enveloped, I mean immersed. No more than a bride can know the mind her husband by giving herself to another man can the mystery be known by intervention of an idol.

Reading literally, to be immersed in the name and word of Messiah has an inward sense of being buried in the letters of a word and the sound, so the literary embedding is active. Immersed, buried in a word, baptism outwardly, the name in the outer sense changed into water, but in the internal sense the letters poured over, the sound fills the mind and ears until

they embed as letters themselves. So baptized we are renamed. Sinking into the Word we become words. In preparation for wearing the Word literally handwritten and bound in the head and hand, composed on top of precepts scraped off, retold over centuries, retold in the night, the Word that underlies and surrounds what is said is a coat to give away that transfers by the will, which you're going to say you've been praying all these years to have. Water was the outer but the sound and the word were within.

Add the guiding eye to the still small voice, the inner speech hearing ear, attuned so a glance serves as a command, as it does on patrol. Eye signals, as between lovers, tilted brow, grimace, smile, they read each others' faces and instruct this way and guide. The sense of it is "be not as the horse and mule that need bit and bridle to come to you." They come not by their will, Psalm 32. 8, so I will guide thee with mine eye. I will watch over you.

Far-seeing, far hearing, far thinking among "great waters," both natural and adverse, seeing ahead and getting to the hiding place that is the Name, the edifice word, the floods are like previous droughts, that took away moisture so much that a plant of its implicitgardener's watering must consist of hearing and seeing though the bones are roaring.

The plant respire to listen. The mule hears. The horse turns its eye. For this "let everyone who is godly pray when thou mayest be found. The result of waterings, listenings, seeings is that songs of deliverance surround him, as likewise mercy. Jesus, Prince of Peace, Glory, Hallelujah. All he has to do is turn his head, eye, mind. As Isaiah, says, he wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught (50. 4-5). Have your ear spiritually bored to the Door! Exodus 21.1-6, Jn. 10.9. Not

that we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, mortality may be swallowed up by life (2 Cor.5:1-4), the blessing that comes from forgiveness covering is the Uncategorical Fluid of Relation.

We want to know more about the dew, a continuation of, “for so the LORD said unto me, I will take my rest, and I will consider in my dwelling place like a clear heat upon herbs, like a cloud of dew in the heat of the harvest” (Isaiah 18.4). The resurrection of the body has a likeness to this herb, held in common in the broadcast of light that Erasmus Darwin saw in flashes from the marigold and in the idea implicit in ‘eseb, the word for herb bearing seed of Genesis 1.29 of a glistening green, a reflective dewy surface, that implication of glistening increases in the ‘owr of Isaiah 18.4 and connotes generation of light, not by reflection, but a being made luminous, set on fire. "I will take my rest" is full of light. This rest produces the essence of oil in the herb, but the herb, being luminous, is a battery of light. Later in Isaiah 26.19f, the feminine of ‘owr is ‘owrah, or “herb-light,” that is, further brightness in the plant, or seeing the luminescence of resurrected bodies revived by the new implanted breath. They are luminous because resurrected. That dew of the herb-light is a supernal revival of decayed bodies, a new Adam coming from dust by Breath (Genesis 2.4). Dew, breath, mist, wind and water resuscitate. The dew that waters the dead, like the dew of the herbs, is light, and so “the earth shall cast out her dead.”

Forewriting

Some books have fore edge paintings that symbol the writing within before the text is opened. These forewritten prewrites and echoes of Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, Ezekiel 28, Job 40-41) occur everywhere in the prophetic encounters of the

meditation of humanity in Psalm 1, the boundary stones of Psalm 8, and the dialogue in heaven before the world began of Psalm 16. This forewriting is written before the world began in the embedded dialogue of Psalm 16 between the Father and Son before Creation. It is not set apart by paragraphs or quotes, but before we descend to the lower places our situation will hope in this.

The Son before the world began says to the Father that it is his desire to redeem creation and therein asks of the Father his care, solace and direction. Messiah will send his goodness to his elect on earth at that time, but away from the Father, for he will actually enter earth. In his travel away however he will remember his origin in truth and not consider the false gods of men. In his incarnate state he will receive the Father's counsel and instruction at night in his dreams. None of this however has as yet happened, for God "is at my right hand." That means he is at God's left hand. Through his trial on the earth cross the Son is honored with the right hand of the Father. This comforts the prophetic moment in his heart because he sees the end in the beginning. That "my flesh...shall rest in hope" indicates a future time after Messiah has both died and harrowed hell. The path of life, his birth, life and death, is the road the savior will take into the womb and world to emerge into "thy presence" resurrected, where he will sit at the Father's right hand "forevermore." Amen.

2. Seattle might best serve as the head of this geography of world Taurobolium where the eye and snout are Amazon, but in the revelation that preconceives its making, parts of CA are gone. The opposite coast once thought Baja was the tail, but people see differently depending on where they live. If states and nations are moral agencies that prophesy by your address, like Everyman passing, you might impose a latitude and longitude map on top and check your coordinates to figure

out how it's going to go for you in the life posed. But the map is always moving slower than the eye can see where nations combine a morality and prophecy of Taurobolium in the form of a sacrifice of a bull.

We find reference in the Revelation to such beasts where the first government of four kings up from sea is a lion with eagle wings. It lifts on two feet a British Royal Lion combined with an American Eagle of all democratic pretense. The second is a bear with three ribs in its mouth, if Russia is chomping down the Baltic. The third up is France's national bird, the Gallic cock surmounted on a leopard with four heads and chicken wings. Germany, shall we say, with all its Nazi survivals. The fourth beast, the one world government of the globe, "dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; had great iron teeth. It devoured, and broke in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it; and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns." This information comes from two informants, the first (10.5f) a certain man clothed in linen whose loins clothed with gold with a body like beryl, with lightning and fire for his face and eyes, and arms and legs of polished brass. When he spoke it was like the sea. The second one looks like a man and enabled speech. Whether these are the same or not, the first had to fight through the prince of Persia and the second continues that fight, which also extends to the prince of Greece.

Since these prophecies emerged from the work in making ceramic frescoes. We cannot say any of it was intended before hand, but it did appear and now we have to deal with it beyond the prince of Greece and into modern results. What the good is in hearing any of this must come only from that warning of St. Jude to save some as though by fire. If any of

it is right, that the barrenness of Cleveland and Columbus are real states with plans to hollow out Ohio in the fracking, for it's just a basin and it's all oil, it's all about connect, connect, as might be found in the Opoems of Ohio, which after, refer to fracking Ohio hollow but not consciously recording it. These connect with the capture of the D51 poems where Akron was mistaken for Gaza and Manhattan desolate is driven out in day. L.A. sees the global shaken to tread the clay. Japan goes sleeping to the sun, but there is yet another to waken earth where New Jersey pulls transcendent bridges swelling spontaneously along a nation-wide decline in body temperature and a drop in metabolic rate. In these confects of the tauroboliums of nations, behemoth and leviathan come. Art comes to prophecy in recognition, embodied in moral states in the same manner that the States are embodied in a nation. The topography of features of the panhandle of Florida, the tip of Maine, the Big Bend of the Rio Grande of Texas, the Rockies become analogues, but of what? The new Madrid fault seems to have risen to heights in the fresco, which leaves us question how this prophetic topography is on one hand a restructuring of the morality on the other, as if geography, morality and prophecy combined. Yes there is darkness around the Mississippi, and some regions look as they are now but others not. What happened to the Great lakes? What is that barren bump of a plateau of parts of Ohio? To raise up Ellen White's idea that America is the false prophet of the beast the land mass here would then resemble a kind of Taurobolium sacrifice with the head, eye and snout in Seattle Amazonia. These states represent agencies too. Besides vacancies of CA the "New Madrid" section had to be glued back on, which leaves the question, not answered, that on the surface of the image we see the country as a cow and the cow of course has all the attributes as to what Nietzsche calls our Susan, a pied cow.

Susan was so big in this fictional rendition, not yet published, that she was like a Taurobolium of States, bigger than a cow, or a bull, a whole country that consumed itself. To tell of her largess, seventeenth century wits cut land masses in analogues of woman from the universe into mountains of alpine crests as breasts, affording such lines as, "Is not the universe strait-laced when I can clasp it in the waist?" Possession of the woman and the land joins in the 'Taurobolium' fun application when the country faces west and not east from its origin. Susan reverses the head of Maine and the front foot of Florida. The west of the fresco is her head, reversing everything as had occurred with the tearing down of its statues, turning self reliance into safe places. Susan as a cow was a Taurobolium of a whole country consumed. In the parlance of course the cow is a bull and bigger than a cow, where all countries together are the oecumene of the known world.

Shall I tell you of her largess? She welcomed whole countries and peoples to populate. Susan was so big you could find out countries in her. Census has been conducted. Was she literally a whole new world? I came and saw her consumed. Ox cries, the worship of wisdom, the group whore, signifying all wisdom religions and 10 metaphysical societies that ever trod, summarized by the Ox that cooks St. Antipas in its kettle at Pergamon and Kepler cooks Mysterium Cosmographicum, and all those Gates of ISIS 2008-2016, Sperm Light in Egypt, Alters in the Marketplace, Time-polarized Electro-Magnetic Signatures, Werther Effects of the Angel Empires (all sites here), which number calculates, gemetrias of Kharazian wonders everywhere in the secret mysterium tauroboliums surrounded by the ace of seduction, the monas hieroglyphica, Ishtar in pants of every member of such societies numerous, small and great. How else we are to gain spiritual knowledge is self evident since these deceptions

affect the highest up with their power while
the lowest down just get doped, but it's all the same.

You can look for where you live in the afterlife there. Impose a latitude and longitude map on top and look up your coordinates. What are these lakes in the dewlaps? The sea in Seattle? The land map is always moving in the sense that not 100 acres of prairie exist any more, their ten feet of topsoil has washed into the Gulf. The impervious runoff of the desert cities might be the waste white areas, like Houston or Dallas, barren only a hundred years ago. How much is myth and how much fact? Buffalo gone, mountains behind, "carried into the midst of the sea" (Psalm 46). Can the Great Lakes drain? And what of these myth mountains exemplified by the Orcopias? Are they myth or fact, and the salt flats? The Orcopedia Mts whose geology represents a physiognomy most like those tortured Orcs as written, shape a dramatic and variable terrain primarily by movements of the adjacent San Andreas Fault over millennia. The Orcopia schist, a blueschist assemblage found in that range, matches the Pelona schist found over 250 km away in the San Gabriel Mountains along the San Andreas fault. Hill and Dibblee (1953) first noted the similarity (a piercing point), and used it to construct the first estimates of the offset on the fault. So if we read the land mass according to the animal it resembles, then the continental U.S. is nicely contained in an east west rectangle figure as a bull, or a cow if you incline to the feminine constraints of geography, unlike say "Chile which is so north and south it comprises an identifiable land figure like a sea horse."

These events connect with each other where the bull is sacrificed for the welfare (salus) of the emperor Empire: "He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. Then he shall kill the bull before the Lord, and Aaron's sons the

priests shall bring the blood and throw the blood against the sides of the altar that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting." (Leviticus 1.4-5). The Taurobolium sacrifice of the world, nations and states, fracking Ohio dry and D51, have nothing to do with each other in time.

That all these events connect to each other and to other events as well, is a tragical saying "beyond meaning" to wonder at an overall cohesion reduced to prophecy at the news stand. A free form poem of ellipses, dips, aggregation and collection magnifies not signified diffuses the data. Do the two-horned beast and the United States belong together? Does the former symbolize the latter? If America is the two horn then its dehorning in the fall of the twin towers applies a sacrifice to a greater global entity, by these very agencies that govern it. The slaughter of the ox is fearsome by itself, but when the ox is a nation, more. And if we start down this road of nations as animals then the bestiary of their zoo world includes even the planets with their geo-besti-ology. The human torso cast as a world, or in America as the woman's body, or as the empire of Logres stretched across Europe as a woman, America cast as a bull to be sacrificed has a certain context in the nations of revelation cast as beasts. To show the simultaneous features of these matters, the ox is one of the four cherubim in Genesis and throughout stands for the living creatures, but the ox is also a Taurobolium of Geography, Morality and Prophecy Combined.

If we are being asked to consider the sacrifice of nations, the taurobolium is more than just nations, but continents, the world, space. To be clear, it is all a concept of the segmentation set into interpretation. Sometimes this is called allegory or symbolism, but the literal facts of it allow a literal reading of events even if these are as unbelievable as if Henry

Ford had started his own race of men. All this together would be sacrifice of space, of the cosmos, which entertainment is real, and so is its plan. By context we mean these 12 ideas occur in an atmosphere of absolute denial and charged with irreality. That justifies them.

We are being asked to understand that animals represent nations and that nations represent a complex of states of mind of evil, not good. That their sacrifice, the sacrifice of nations by the global world priests is to serve the greater purpose of their conspiracy. So America is the bull to be sacrificed for this world order to achieve its ends.

The sacrifice of nations in a Taurobolium as big as a globe, is more than just states, continents, seas, world. This is all a concept of segmentation sometimes called allegory or symbol, but the literal facts take a literal reading, even if these are as unbelievable as if Henry Ford had started his own race of men. These form a Taurobolium sacrifice of space, the cosmos, which entertainment is as real as its plan. The absolute denial surrounding these ideas is charged with irreality by the opposition.

In the sacred texts of the beasts coming up from the sea animals represent nations and nations represent a complex of states of the mind of evil, not of good. The sacrifice of nations by the global priests serves the purpose of their conspiracy. So America as a bull sacrificed for this world to achieve, extended the Taurobolium to the continental U.S. nicely contorted in an east west rectangle figure of a bull. Contrasted to Chile north and south, the land figure of a sea horse, these always emerge naturalistically from the work at hand, but not a hundred acres of first prairie exist. Ten feet of topsoil washed to the sea. Buffalo gone, the

mountains behind? Can the Great Lakes drain, the sea, Austin sink? And what of these myth mountains that geological physiognomy most distorts, the Orocopia blue schist assemblage and the Pelona schist along the fault, like the piercing point used to construct the first offset? The taurobolium of imaginative maps compares to real versions of the Oecomene, as where the Wild Duck, Museum-copy of a wall painting of Akrotiri, 17th cent. BC, Xeste 3, Room 3b, SANTOZEUM, Santorini / Fira.

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3. Why anyone would live where the myths of supernatural beasts attract danger from angels and cherubim or further up the hill lands herds of behemoths were thought to roam, though nobody ever saw but one, and from the sea behind the penetrating trough of rivers swam inland the most outlandish sea serpents out of the Odyssey and Laocoön. I omit the wasps. Immediately afterward is written, reporting first that the endless rebroadcast of seesaw Sacch'ry-down facts by analogy gives insight to partial occurrences.

In the use of ancient cities as habitations of myth, but personally by their exploration, they all have undergrounds as modern cities do. An examination of Seattle, which leads to the Washington D.C. underground is a counterpart to Satanic Florence in Dante where Dante's map of the fallen cosmos in human form is a picture of the eye. He takes the physical world as an allegory of the spiritual. The Seattle of Bezos taught us this in its SIS, Amazon, frequency weapon experiments on the homeless. Guards at Amazon act as monitor eyes and ears to transmit images to computers to ID each face entering. Cyberized cameras identify Seattle homeless as a general laboratory for development of frequency weapons on targeted individuals via SIS. While it would seem removed from the question of undergrounds

Antarctica is a factor in later chapters for its use especially in the present, for its passages older than the most ancient passages of Sumer. To dream of these caverns as a child and traverse them too, before reading Tolkien, I explored natural caves, Schoolhouse Cave especially, a most wholesome experience compared to the artifact Under Ground. Of course it doesn't help that underground structures miles down have been built in the U.S. and Europe and elsewhere from the 80s forward. That these are also honeycombed with transportation structures, trains, roads so civilized, is unlike the wild state all implicit with what should not be uttered, but which is voiced in the analogy and the whole that outlives its knowledge of the future and all its divinations. In its SIS frequency weapon experiments on the homeless, the robot guards at Amazon act as monitor eyes and ears to transmit images to computers to ID each face. Cyberized cameras identify Seattle homeless and the general population as a laboratory for further development of frequency weapons that experiment on targeted individuals via SIS. Seattle is the capital of the new slavery in this civil war, like Atlanta of the old south, purveyor of digital slavery, servitude, crowd sources, clouds, clones, robots, AI, data base, data mining. These know nothing of the primal emotions, so if they speak of lust, it is some pale shade. Verizon now boasts it will be the champion of the 5G rollout where the gills curve up to meet the stalk, notched to join the top. Whoever's on the beanstalk that swaps their cow for a wonder stick or a bee that sings and a fiddle that plays pop-tunes, that is the good cow Milky White whose wonders appear in the tales. As puppoets live pop tunes, climb the beanstalk or cut it down, exchange a cow for seeds that grow to climb to the gates of heaven, get up to find Jack Bommb, that moonlight idol whose Temple serves all who climb the sky.

Of old some of these districts were called--Gateway to

Heaven- “a rural suburb below Jerusalem called Motza was actually a place called Kolonia but referred to as motza—exempt.” And it's not as if they need a place to worship. The gods are all over Serapeum of Saqqara, Alexandria, burial place of the Apis bull—combined geography, morality and prophecy as a Taurobolium, sacrifice of a bull. The brazen bull of the Taurobolium was also a metaphor of concurrent media crises, Covid- 19 virus, rioting cities, election frauds--all fires set under the hollow bronze bull, heating the metal until the prisoners locked inside are roasted to death as their cries are translated through a system of tubes and stops into sounds like the bellowing of an infuriated bull. The Re:Set is that Brazen Bull. Antipas, Bishop of Pergamon, was ordained by the Apostle John during the reign of the Nero, and martyred when he cast out demons worshiped, by being burned in a brazen bull-shaped altar. In the capital of the new south in Seattle, the coincidence of numbers 33 with geographical parallels correlates with the I Ching, the Chinese language, the Mayan Calender, the Hopi Blue Star, Niburu, Richard Hoagland's take on the Mars escapees, abductees on Iapetus, channeled and rechanneled gibberings of Isis, alarmed abductees, scientist lab rat bred hybrids and gov't agents disinforming, or none of the above. To know for sure go to ancient literature, to veracious Homer, Gilgamesh, Plato -- but finally go Old Testament Isaiah, Ezekiel, Job, Genesis, Psalms in amazement of Isaiah. Isaiah 53 read at every communion. Also read Isaiah 14 and find everywhere astonishing words. The end of Isaiah is like the last of Beethoven's String Quartets, an incomprehension at the height of words. So it comes that leviathan, thought mostly as an image in Job 41, is a profounding prophetic of eviathan. The thing about tentacles that reach through land and sea is that they are digital, electronic and mimic pattern DNA*Reported on as literatures of fact. Each facility of the Futurist playbook opposing Bolshevik society in those 1920's translated to the new Bolshevik

societies of the 2020s completes this era of one hundred years of censorship, again opposed by the fakta of a continent and an age apart from the original. The formalist theories of faktovivi however bypass algorithmic controls to code hidden propitiatory work, read correctly. The first priority remains accentuated real material gathered either first hand or culled from documentary sources.

Aggregator Bulls and bears, chicken, lion, eagle, and a man could interchange in these roles, which geologies spin every proportion and property of the place. If passage tombs could talk, or rock, volcanic ash, reburiedfeldspar, then the fish streams under clay spines, speak more. Kiss the Beast Government come up out of the sea. The first a lion with eagle wings plucked, lifted from the earth and made to stand on its feet like a man with a human heart. The second a bear raised up on one side with three ribs in its mouth. The third a leopard with four chicken wings on its back and four heads puts Colonel Sanders out of business. The fourth kingdom unlike the others covers the world and devours them all. Ravenous epithets frag the mount, Programmable matter senses actuation and display. How Taurobolium, Behemoth and Leviathan involve this particular century passion before being locked up is prescient in the bag drowning and boiling in oil of Ur-Mennonites on the Rhine. Spotted everywhere from the animus rolling Zurich and Bern, these Palatinates escaped and every one of that generation of Swiss 16ancestors, Clemmer, Gehman, Rosenberger, Landis, Clemens, Bechtel set their faces to get to Philadelphia. Of course flesh is not stone, not dug with steam shovels and picks but dessicated, shrunk, contracted to reveal hidden springs when all that mass is taken, hidden springs, tree roots and strata, so it's hard to think itself unique to make a resonant chamber, the soul, each day carry down to the sea a little bucket of sand and bring back another of water up the shore, mold castles and shapes of the moon, if such a thing has shape. Each day without end change tack, little bucket down or experience digs out a little

more solid, shaping, to imagine in a hundred years accelerated, destined, predestined times and persons, internal resonating in a chamber. Located nowhere at all, there exists a resonant cavity and the outward chamber of the mouth, it is the soul, none other, inside the throat, those caves and nasal beauties above, upper chamber where beauty lives and all sounds, vowels, stops take seat in production of the soul and echo relation, ventriloquism by pseudonym, not of a puppet master, though we should consider it, but a speaking through the present of the past, To include the imaginations of those times in familiar occupation, a back story explanation of symbol, called rehabilitation of myth, cites collective remembrance and recognition to unencumber history of the human. We call it myth, confined just to the Greek, but far and wide it is about something multidimensional in the religion of the symbolism of the leviathan's fins, by which it propels itself from one end of the world to the other: as it were, effortlessly through the realms, making enormous progress all at once. This became the philosophy of Francis Bacon for all say so.

When the righteous translate words to oppose the fabrication inside Behemoth that drinks up Jordan through its nose or the occultist Böhme eating the flesh of behemoth or leviathan, le géant, as if it were flesh, whose devotees download light when they travel without their bodies, all the water of Jordan flows to that sea to take liberty that Leviathan will eventually do battle with the shor habar and slaughter it, so we understand the mode of worship of those righteous analogized to the shor habar. In one respect land-righteous superior to that of sea-righteous since the Everlasting did.

At Night She Dreams

By J.M. Summers

At night she dreams of the babies that have been taken away, while clutching the latest still to her breast. They will remember, though she does not, the times they found her passed out after a drink, or more, too many, how they had to share uniform because the child support went on the booze, the time they found her on the bridge over the dual carriageway, threatening to jump. The betrayal she makes of the latest in the same way that she did the first, frothing at the mouth after the overdose, though she does not remember either the long wait for the ambulance or the operator asking if the children cannot transport her themselves. "How old are you?" Ages which blur one into the other, remembering only the dull ache that is the presence and the absence at her breast, treacheries made in the past, present, and future tense, the spring rain which falls steadily, the betrayal it makes of the new season, too.

New Year

By Ayan Chakraborty

In some twenty minutes to another year
between true intent and some real terror of losing a day's
income;
there comes a bicycle ringing, panting,
on it rides one of those dark eyed guys we never care cursing
on;
one of those steel handed men who was denied navigation by
a celeb
who, at her turn, refused to act as the doorkeeper;
one of those curly haired men whose beads of sweat await rest
with his family.
One of those whose daughter, now five, is still awake to hug
her dad at the new year's stroke. That night is today.
He is the one.
One of those men who is different from you and me at the
cool rooms around the automated teller machines.
One of those who differs just by a thread or a cap or a cross.
One of those who still wishes you on the new year's eve to
hurry back on that old bicycle;
it's wheels as old as his youthful legs.
He scuds past men like you and me in a whiff.
Back to his daughter , to greet her with a cake or a toy car,
before she would sleep.

Pardoned

By Urmi

Aliya was never a striking beauty. In fact she never even brandished any delicate feminine charm. Her petite , five-foot frame reverberated strength and determination. Yet there was something enticing about her, something that caused the young men to hopelessly lose their heart on her. She was just 17 then; studious, diligent and indifferent to all the amorous attention in our close-knit, small town muhalla.

She was instead focused on what mattered to her most; getting admission in a good college after her 12th. In our part of the world academic pursuit is still not a priority, especially among the girls. Graduation from a low profile college was good enough to get married off to a prospective groom. In addition some learned tailoring or computer data entry and sought sundry jobs to supplement the average earnings of their husbands. The boys mostly joined their father's business or started their own. On rare occasions when some who took admission in elite colleges were celebrated by all. But Aliya was different. She wanted to make it big. In her tiny two-roomed shabby apartment which housed her parents, grandmother and 3 other siblings she fought most

afternoons with the chaos and distraction to seek a quiet corner to revise her Biology or solve her math problems.

Sharafat had very little relation with books. Just enough perhaps to make him survive the annual exams. He was tall, handsome, strong, muscular and definitely vain about himself. Most evenings he loafed around in the streets, purposeless. When he failed a couple of papers in his class 12, his father realized that Sharafat was definitely not scholastic by nature. So he mandated it for him to be available in the hardware shop that he owned at the end of the road at least three evenings a week. But even with all his shortcomings he still had earned the respect and fear of most in the neighborhood. Respect because he was an ardent namazi, attending Friday prayers without fail. Fear because of his alliance with the local political figures, helping them win elections with his brawn and charm.

That Sharafat was smitten by Aliya, we all knew. Though the extent of his infatuation was really not known. But the day Ashrat came in with his nose bleeding because he had dared to sneak in for a private conversation with Aliya, we learnt she was best avoided. We could, though frankly, never picture the two as a pair; the determined and enterprising Aliya and the indolent Sharafat. But the evening Sharafat gave us a treat

of nan and kebabs because his parents and Aliya's agreed on their engagement, we realized that money and power could buy most things in life.

Well, it wasn't just Sharafat's father's flourishing business that led to the alliance. It was also the fact that Ali was stalking the girl on most days and her petrified father thought that it was best to appoint a bodyguard to his daughter in our patriarchal, women-gawking world. The news of betrothal came a couple of months after the higher secondary results declared Aliya had cleared the exam with flying colors while Sharafat had managed to clear the Economics paper he had failed to pass the previous year.

Aliya had got admission in a government nursing college. Many said she could have perhaps secured a seat for medicine as well if her father could afford the requisite coaching and ambience. Nevertheless it was time for celebration! We congratulated Sharafat who came sauntering into our evening conclave.

"My mother got married after she passed her eight. Her father disconnected her from school and got her betrothed. And here I am allowing my wife-to-be to pursue a professional degree. World is progressing." he boasted, as if the credit goes to his permission rather than Aliya's years of hard work!

The alliance did good to the arrogant and imprudent Sharafat. He enrolled in a night college to do his graduation. He worked in the hardware shop all day. The changed man pleased and surprised us all. Till one thundering evening he came in his bike, drenched in rain and fury.

Apparently he had discovered Aliya having ice cream in a nearby cafe with a couple of friends which included a man. "Can you believe the audacity!" he exclaimed. "And she said she will never apologize for doing something that wasn't wrong."

Must be a friend. We tried to reason to which he gave a disgruntled snort.

The wedding took place a few months after Aliya's nursing course had completed. Sharafat's father gave a grand reception. Aliya looked resplendent and aloof in her brilliant wedding trousseau. Sharafat looked victorious. We recalled the constant collision the couple have had in the last years to which we were mute spectators. Collision on principle, on outlook of life, collision while Sharafat tried, in vain, to establish his sovereignty and supremacy over the calm, unperturbed but uncompromising Aliya. Unlike what Sharafat had seen and envisaged women to be, Aliya knew what she wanted and what she would do. Unlike what Sharafat had

ever imagined, she was unapologetic about being she at all instance.

They say marriages are made in heaven. I wonder whether Allah sometimes uses the alliance to make us grow and mature. Sharafat and Aliya's story definitely pulled us out of that lull and mysticism we call love. Everyday we saw Sharafat grow from a carefree and callous boy to an irritable, suspicious man. His complaints were endless. Aliya often comes late from work. Sometimes her male coworkers drop her on their bikes. She often does not pick up his midday calls.

“And she never regrets that I am angry with her! Why? I am her husband after all! How dare she prioritize the rest of her affairs before me !” he would cry indignantly to which we gave mixed reactions.

Aliya, on the other hand, grew even more miser with words, withdrawing her already introverted self into a shell. She denied Sharafat the pleasure of seeing her broken. Yet her melancholic eyes told us a different story. On rare occasions when Sharafat called us home for tea and snacks, she maintained her dignified silence. In fact so aloof she remained that many thought she found it ignoble to talk to

urchins like us. But I suspect there was dejection behind her firmness.

It was perhaps two years into their marriage when the unimaginable happened. Aliya had got a job in government hospitals. Her first posting was in Kolkata. She had planned to leave for the city. Aliya suggested maybe Sharafat could join her there and start a shop? Sharafat was furious. On a sticky June evening he kept complaining about the audacity of 'this woman'. How can you expect a man to follow his wife? He had permitted his wife to work. Was that not good enough? Why does she now want to step outside their hometown to follow her dreams? We tried to calm him down. We told him the benefits of having a government job. Would they not enjoy the benefits as a couple? Maybe she can gradually try to take a transfer back to Burdwan? But our words of advice fell on deaf ears.

When words fell short in front of the stone-faced, determined Aliya, Sharafat resorted to violence. Aliya now sported blue bruise marks on her hands and face which she cautiously described as results of domestic accidents. What else could she do? Even her parents made it clear that though she might have made them proud by studying nursing, as a wife she must make her husband's wish her priority. She was anyway

working here. Was she not? For Aliya her entire world crumbled, the known faces turned unrecognizable, her loved ones strangers. Then one day, when the arguments turned uglier, when anger consumed both so much that they became unrecognizable even to themselves, Sharafat picked up the gardening scythe kept in their shade, and struck her a blow. His unshaking hands, his clouded mind intoxicated with wrath did not consider for once the consequences. Did not think for once that the hand chopped off belonged to the girl he had once dreamt of all day long, the girl whose mere smile would make his day. It was only when a gush of turbulent red fluid messed up the house did he understand what he had done. But it was too late.

Aliya struggled for hours in the hospital switching in and out of consciousness. But she is a fighter and though handicapped she held onto her life till the end. Aliya's story became the headlines. Her parents now approached the police who dragged away a now repentant Sharafat for attempted murder charges. Everyone, even his own family turned against him. They knew he often fought with his wife, hurtling her insults. They knew at times he hit her. But such trivial issues happen in all families, don't they? But to amputate someone's arms in a fit of rage? No they did not

support that! Sharafat lived in an abandoned world with his remorse and accusing eyes of all.

After around three months of arduous struggle in and out of the hospital, Aliya somewhat got back to life. The severed hand, though, remained a constant reminder of her tormentous past. Her story, as I already mentioned, was a headline making her a hero who has fought through odds and a fundamentalist husband. The local politicians felicitated her. She was offered a government job in the administrative department of the hospital. Her dream of being a nurse remained a dream.

Our story is really not about Aliya, the woman who won by losing. It is more about Sharafat. What happened to him? Undoubtedly Aliya divorced him once she was back on her feet. This time she got the full support of her family. In our country a woman really needs to lose an arm or life or sanity to make her family realize that perhaps 'adjusting' is not the only option. In this country only catastrophe makes a man's family realize that their son is going astray. Sharafat remained an undertrial. Every night in the dark corner of his new 'home' he wondered what life could have been had he not lost his mind that night! At night he woke up from nightmares where saw himself killing Aliya with his bare

hands. When he was young he had been the pride of his parents for being strong and athletic; the boy who always scored the most goals, came first in sports; the boy admired and feared by all. Now that very muscular arm that he was so vain about became his enemy. He wished he could chop them off instead of Aliya's.

When his parents came to visit him , his father clearly stated he was ashamed of his son's act and though he was employing a lawyer so that his ' attempt to murder' charges were changed to domestic violence and his sentence was reduced, he clearly couldn't support him otherwise. But it wasn't his words that shattered him to pieces. They hardly hit his ears. It was instead the betrayed look in his eyes that sank Sharafat's heart. His mother sobbed helplessly, defeated and almost dead, punishing him more than any legal penalty can ever do.

When his sister's child was born and he came to visit home on bail, he stood in the corner, unspoken, unheard. Though he remained mute like an inanimate object , though no one jibed him or tortured him with unnecessary sermons, he knew he was the most looked at, most talked about person. He felt the gaze of a thousand pairs of accusing eyes burn him. On the lonely noon when I walked up to the terrace after a

celebratory lunch at his home, I found him sitting silently in a corner.

“I want to return tomorrow,” he said resolutely.

“Why? Are you not supposed to stay till next week,”

“Hmm,” he replied in monosyllable looking away.

I realized he feels more at home with convicts and undertrials who share his quota of fate, who was a ‘harami’ like him. The gaze of the accusing innocent was worse than the dark dungeons of the prison.

After around five months of stay in judicial custody, Sharafat came home. He was hardly recognisable; his eyes sunken, his frame shriveled up. The five months had taken years off his life! But more than that it was the way he behaved that concerned us. He had completely withdrawn himself. His mother told us that Aliya had withdrawn all charges. In the evening after an hour of cajoling when he finally opened I told him,

“Isn’t this a good thing? It gives you a new lease of life?”

After minutes of silence which felt forever, he replied,

“She said she no longer wants to pursue this case because it is impossible for her to invest all that time in court. She has a bright life ahead. The people in the hospital love her. She has taken up a flat where she plans to set up her solo life. She

says she is happy, very happy. She does not want to see me and remember all the dark days of her past.”

“That is good. It takes away some guilt from you. Now you focus on your life.”

“Hmm.” he said, looking away at the far horizon. The sky was now amber with the setting sun.

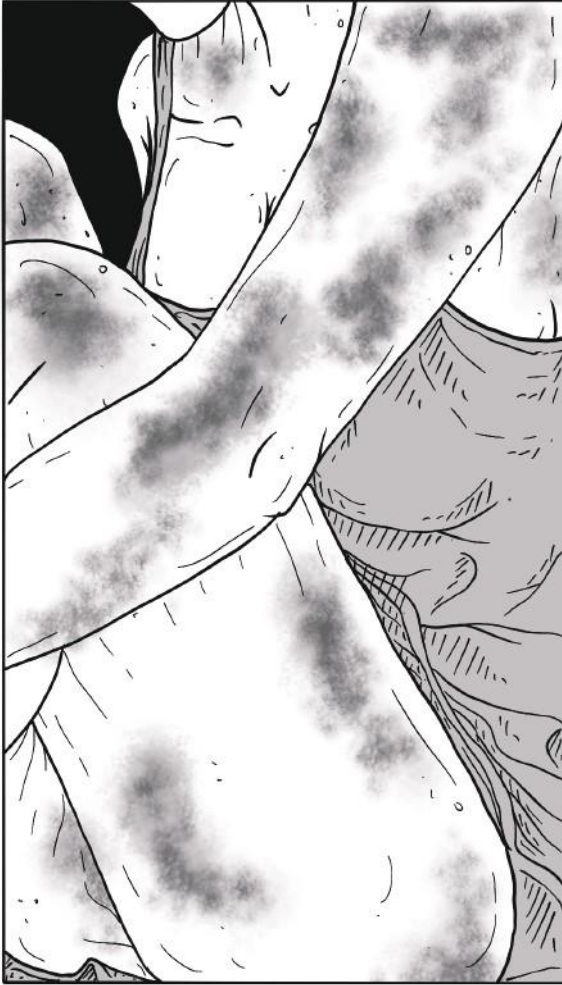
“What is it?” I queried, sensing unsaid words in his silence.

“She has no time even to fight against me. She...she does not find me worthy to be even her enemy.” his eyes glistened for the first time in his life. The boy who never cried even when he had hurt himself when he was six now struggled to keep back the emotions flowing through his eyes.

I realized Aliya had killed him with her forgiveness.

Rotting Pieces

By Shehab Adel



Rotting Pieces

By Fayrouz Ebeid

I curse the day you let your eyes lay on my
bruised skin.

You took little pieces of me

Little pieces over time

So small, I didn't notice

I keep forgetting that my capacity of pain is full

I go on adding more scars to my heart

Each night, I lay on my side

breathing in the dark,

wondering how many more times

do I have to grieve pieces of myself

rotting in another's heart.

in the silence of the dark

by Santwana Chatterjee

I won't come to you.
I promise, never.
But for ever and ever,
I would be with you
in your dreams and your thoughts.
I won't let you catch me, my dear.
But I would be there in the books in your hands,
In the lyrics that you love,
In the words that make you laugh and cry.
I would be there in the evening breeze,
To cool you and to hug you as I wish.
No, I won't ask for favours
But look for me in the pain and the tears
that separate us.
At the dead of night
Silently and softly
I would mingle in your soul
Sleeping in oblivion.
I promise, I won't hold you in my arms.
But kindling the flame of hope and desire in my heart
I shall wait for you in the silence of the dark.

BROKEN SHELL

By Iwuagwu Ikechukwu

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And He who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new. __Revelations 21:4

Some stories are written with pen
Others are written with pain

Mine is a mixture of both
the tale of a leaking boat

Like the tender butterfly
Like the doves that fly

Innocence laced my breath
Great morrows conversed with my faith

The smiling embers set to frown beneath palls of ash
the best worst gift to my hope - a dash

Plundered by earthly ways
into despair's stack of hays

Upon strife's pathway I trod
Suicide, against my tender rind prod

Like skyscrapers piercing the fluffy skies
My mood - a fluctuating graph of lows and highs

The reaper speared my hopes at fate's whim
Pilfering pieces of me with a smiley grim

Abandoned at the backyard of sorrow
Depression my pillow for morrow upon morrow

Society whispers "You are a man, cry not, be strong,"
"They are old and gone, you're young"

I melt within but afloat a rock
Emptiness abounds, my mood to mock

Spent, spineless standing at the precipice
Suicide lured, adorning itself a beautiful piece

To give up, almost did I
Till I hearkened the voice divine

"Come unto me all ye that are heavy laden
and I shall give you rest" this yoke I bear, I feel fading

Mine is the legend of the Phoenix
ashes of tragi-comic mix

Together with Christ, I slept at Golgotha
And woke anew three suns later

I rise, my wits and will converge
a brand new me emerge.

Cherish

By Peter Devonald

Make the most of mum and dad
even if they are awkward
or difficult

or impossible
we only have one of each
find a way to connect and create memories

something positive to look back on
I know it's hard, but try to understand
their life and all its struggles

every generation of parents vow to be better
than their parents, so they entitle and empower
to the point they create selfish childish hubris.

The next generation of parents know the folly
of that way and so create
lovely quiet wonderful humans

who hate themselves
their ego squashed and crushed
don't be big headed, no one likes like a big head

well-meaning words to stop
narcissistic desire
cripple the next generation on a whim

their self-esteem in the gutter, can't even
see the stars
past the high rise flats

their despair beyond repair

they vow to boost their kids
with so much care

so they entitle and empower
to the point of selfish childish hubris
and the whole goddam spiralling circle

goes around and around and around
till none of us are even around
anymore.

Break the chain, break the cycle
see the spiral, stop the repeat
do something different, go crazy!

Nourish and help your children grow
with balance, love and sincerity
is it really so difficult?

Sisyphus

By Adam Barentine

In so far as the life I've lived up to now,
I've been fighting a river while headed upstream.
Throwing punches at waves
in a toothless attempt to reverse the tide.
An unconscious trend of choosing
the most difficult path available.
Not for sport, nor glory,
but from sheer ignorance
and a blind will to force my square peg
into the nearest round hole.
We age as children from soft shells of nothing
into adults who've caught only what we can.
Left alone to our devices.
The ones we create
out of compounded experiences.
Reason be damned by this
lack of spatial awareness.
The fastest way downhill is to trip.

THE GATEKEEPER

By Rhiannon Bird

August jumped down from the ladder and landed with a thud. “All done.” She said dusting her hands together before taking off her goggles. The old man gave her a sidelong look and inspected his contraption. It was supposed to fly. It never would. She’d been able to get the broken wing to move but she doubted he’d be able to make it do anything more than that. She slipped her leather jacket over her grease stained overalls as he inspected it.

“I guess that’s fine,” he grunted.

“The payment?” She was done with this selfish pig, August just wanted to get her parts and get out.

“Take what you desire,” he waved a dismissive hand at her walking out of the room, she rolled her eyes. Asshole. August collected her tools and the parts she needed plus a few extra for him being a jerk. She stepped outside quickly raising her bandanna over her mouth and nose. August hurried down the street in the direction of home. Smog hung in the air and clogged her vision, but she made every turn like clockwork. She winced as her right leg stumbled from the familiar pinching sensation. Almost home. There was a dull ache in her thigh by the time she pushed through the door.

“Augustine is that you?” August sighed as her mother’s voice floated through the house.

“Yes, I’ll be in the workshop,” she said disappearing quickly into a room. Dumping her tools, she half limped over to the bench to sit at the stool there. She took a deep breath before wiggling out of her jeans. Now without the denim muffling it, her leg let out a low clinking sound. She pulled out all manner of things stuck between her cogs. Once she was satisfied she searched through her collection. Hopefully these gear parts would stop the constant aching. The mechanical leg came up to just above her knee and there was a red ring where metal met flesh. She rubbed the skin absentmindedly to alleviate the pain as she worked. August

moved her leg back and forth. The mobility seemed good and it didn't hurt. Yet.

"Augustine," her mother's voice was frantic. August tried not to sigh as she pulled the jeans back on. If it was another spider she was going to be annoyed.

"What is it?" She slid her favorite wrench into her back pocket and left the workshop. August stopped mid step as her mother's face came into view. She had wide eyes and red flushed cheeks.

"Byron's gone."

August's leg almost gave out. "What? When?"

"Martin just got back and said that he ran off."

"Martin, are you serious? You let your drunk boyfriend lose my brother!" She shook her head; this was a new low. Her mother gave her a sheepish smile. "Where were they when By disappeared?" August stormed angrily towards the door.

"East side on eleventh street," she replied. "I'll check around here in case he's trying to make it home but got lost."

"Don't bother," August said through her teeth. "I know where he went. Also," she turned from the front door. "Tell Martin, go to hell!" She left before her mother got too defensive. The smoke rushed into her lungs and she coughed violently before pulling her bandana up. She was running despite the pain that shot through her leg. Skidding around corners she headed straight for the east side. Figures materialized out of the smog and she slid around them unstably. She reached eleventh and pounded down the street.

The fog wasn't as heavy here, it thinned the further she ran. August slid to a halt as she reached the end of the street. It was a T intersection. One lead back into the heart of the city while the other lead out of it. An old street sign pointed out of the city. It swung in the breeze making a creak. She stepped down the road. "Byron," she yelled.

Curse Martin for bringing Byron here and curse Byron for being obsessed with the world outside the city. People always went missing here; it was why no one left, no

one except her brother apparently. The further August walked the faster she got, the smog was thin enough to pull the bandanna back down around her neck. “Byron,” her voice was starting to hurt and the sun was setting. Damn, it was not good to be out here at night. “Byron,” her shouts were getting more frantic. Something loomed out from the side of the road, she approached slowly and carefully. She straightened in surprise. It was a tree. Large and green and natural. Her eyes widened, she’d never seen one with her own eyes. There were more behind it, they were everywhere. Suddenly she felt very out of place, as if she’d stepped into a different world. One that didn’t want her here. She kept walking timidly down the road. The trees became denser and the air felt different. It felt cleaner. But she couldn’t see any air cleansers anywhere. Weird.

August shook her head, no distractions. She opened her mouth to shout again when she heard a sound. A crunch. Her entire body froze. It wasn’t Byron, he was too light and the thing making noise was heavy. The crunches came closer, it was walking. Walking straight towards her. She scrambled backwards and her back hit something hard. The solid object was the trunk of a tree, a branch stuck out next to her head, she wrapped her hands around it and pulled herself up. All her muscles screamed in protest and the branch bit into her hands. She kicked out her legs to try and propel herself up. As soon as she’d pulled herself up, she stretched up to grab hold of the next one. The distance was shorter and more manageable this time. She didn’t reach for a third branch. Instead she held her breath. The thing was there.

August crouched low on the branch. The creature was as tall as her waist and almost twice as wide. It had mottled skin reminding her of the scaled bags rich ladies always carried. Four long spikes protruded from a triangular head and a long tail swayed back and forth as it walked. The tail looked muscular and had a large hammer shape on its end. Six legs each with three claws held the creature upright and moonlight glinted off its pointed teeth as it moved its head.

Large elliptical eyes searched the surroundings for movement. August squeezed her eyes shut and tried to steady her breathing. There were some shuffling sounds, crunching then silence. She opened one eye, it was gone, the beast hadn't found her, she slouched in relief against the trunk of the tree.

August hadn't plucked up the courage to move yet. She was too worried about the beast returning. She was beginning to convince herself to climb down when the crunching returned. The sounds of the beast drew closer and closer. It passed underneath her tree and her hand flung to her mouth to cover her gasp. There was Byron, breathing but unconscious. The monster had him clutched in its tail, pressed right against the hammer. He looked so small and fragile in the moonlight. August lowered herself slowly down to the ground and crept after it keeping as quiet as possible. She had no plan, the only thought in her head was getting to Byron.

A clang rang out through the trees, the sound of metal on metal. The beast looked around suspiciously before something fell from the tree top and landed on the back of the beast. August stopped in shock, there was a person on its back. The beast let out a guttural roar of protest as it dropped Byron to use its tail on the attacker. That spurred her into action, she leapt forward but not fast enough as Byron crashed hard against the ground. He groaned slightly and blinked blearily she pulled him into her arms as he woke.

The person jumped off the beast and gestured for them to follow. There was no time to argue, it was turning towards them. August gripped Byron tightly and ran. There was a crashing sound behind them as it pursued. The person in front of them sprinted straight towards a rock wall and ducked into a crevice. It was a tight fit but once they squeezed in it opened into a small cave. August put the now awake Byron on the ground away from the entrance and checked him over for any injuries. Once she was sure that he wasn't hurt she turned to the person they'd followed. A

young man with dark hair and a soft face smiled back at them. Not like the grease monkeys that she was used to seeing on the streets.

“Well that was exciting, wasn’t it?” he said giving her a goofy smile. She rolled her eyes, an adrenaline junkie. “Lucky I got to you in time.”

“I had it handled,” she said and pulled out the wrench to lay it beside her as she lowered herself into a sitting position.

“No, you didn’t, that monster was heading back to its den to eat the kid, so I’d say you were not handling it.” She didn’t answer instead focusing on rolling up her jean leg.

“I’m Walter by the way,” he said leaning back on the wall. He jumped in surprise as the cogs in her leg appeared. “What the hell?” She ignored him. Some of the gears were sticking, it made her wince but without her other tools there wasn’t much that she could do. Byron crouched beside her, his big wide eyes staring intently,

“Is it hurting again?”

“No, of course not buddy. I’m just checking on it.” She quickly fiddled with the gears before she covered her leg again. Walter still had wide eyes and his mouth hanging half open. “I got in an accident three years ago and now I have a metal leg, get over it.” He nodded and shut his mouth, but his eyes wouldn’t leave the now covered leg. August picked up her wrench and pushed herself off the ground, ignoring the pinching from her leg. There was a colossal bang, which made them all jump backwards. It was the beast, it had slammed against the side of the rock wall. She pulled Byron close to her, “That’s not good.”

“No it’s fine, he can’t get to us in here.” One short clawed arm reached into the crevice and all three of them stepped away from it. The claw moved back and forth catching only air before it withdrew. “What did I tell you, we are-” then the scratching started, the beast was clawing at the rock. She looked over at Walter, he returned an uneasy look. Rock dust and debris fell to the ground. It was slow but if the

beast persisted it would get to them eventually. She mouthed at Walter, '*Do something.*' He shrugged at her. God, he was annoying. Her eyes scanned the cave they were in, rocks and a few sticks but that was about it. There were no other exits.

August leaned down and picked up a large rock in her hand. She pushed Byron behind her and inched forward. When she was as close as she dared to get to the entrance she pulled her arm back and threw the rock. It sailed clean over the beast's head and out into the night. "You missed," Walter hissed. "He was right there, how could you miss?"

"I didn't miss," she waved an annoyed hand at him. The rock landed with a crash somewhere off in the forest. The beast stopped and cocked its head to the side. Behind her, Walter gasped in understanding. For a moment she thought the beast wasn't going to leave.

It looked back at her through the crevice with calculating eyes before it slunk off into the trees. She waited a beat to make sure it was gone. "We have to go. Now!" She said urgently reaching for her brother. They left the cave and ran.

"Follow me," Walter said. She was glad at least one of them knew where they were going. Her right thigh was throbbing, but she ignored it. Byron was starting to slow, his body getting tired, she grabbed his hand to pull him along. He was still dragging behind.

There was a crash behind them and the thud of heavy feet hitting the ground. Walter turned to look back, he scooped up Byron and kept running. August heard her heart as it pounded in her ears and everything in her body was screamed, but she pushed herself further. They could make it out of this. They broke out of the trees and skidded out onto the road. Fearing road, they'd made it back. Now they just had to follow it to the city, they would be safe there; hopefully. She pumped her arms and legs. Walter was faster than her, even holding Byron. Not too much further, she could see the thick smog getting closer.

August knew the feeling a second before it happened, the same cold loss of control every time. All the gears in her legs froze, she was able to take a few more lunging steps before she crashed to the ground. “August!” Byron yelled. Walter spun and looked at her wide eyed, he made to step towards her.

“Get my brother back to the city,” she yelled in desperation. He gulped but nodded at her and Byron screamed in protest. She let out a breath of relief as they disappeared into the smog ahead. The relief didn’t last; behind her, deep ragged breaths hit the back of her neck. Slowly she turned to look up at the beast, its wide cruel eyes looked down at her and its multitudes of sharpened teeth smiled menacingly. She took in a shuddering breath as it clamped its mouth down on her leg, her right leg. At least she couldn’t feel it but running away was now out of the picture. It dragged her over to a near by tree and slammed her against the trunk. She screamed in surprise and swear she felt something crunch. The side of her body throbbed from the bruise forming across it. She held her breath and lay as still as possible, playing dead as it inspected her. Satisfied it began pulling her towards the den, she let out a sigh of relief.

August’s breathing was ragged as she was pulled deeper into the trees. She had one chance to get out of this, one chance, she better not mess it up. Her hand reached back slowly to grip the wrench in her pocket and held it tightly. As they neared a large cave opening her body tensed. Inside the cave the beast rose up to its full height. She rolled quickly to the side just as its head snapped down to the place she had just been. It snorted in anger as August pushed herself up onto her knees. It swung towards her and roared in pain as she struck it in the eye with her wrench. The beast lashed out and she threw up her arm, the cut was shallow but still stung. August forced herself to stand. All her weight pushed down on her unsteady left leg.

“Come on,” she said aggressively swinging the wrench as she spoke. The beast looked at her, one eye shut

and the other narrowed. It moved fast. Her brain was having trouble keeping up. Duck right, now left, avoid the claws and watch the tail. Her movements were becoming clumsy, she was barely holding on. All she needed was one opening before she collapsed. One chance.

Then she saw it. The beast crouched low and the tail drew back ready to strike. August leapt to the side as the tail came down and sound echoed around the cave. Before the beast could turn she jammed the end of the wrench around one of its head spikes and twisted. There was a crunch as it broke off, the beast yowled in pain. She grabbed the spike and plunged it deep into the neck of the beast; its whole body tensed. August fell back and scrambled away from the creature. It swayed a few times as if it was drunk and crashed to the floor.

She let her head fall back against the rock. Deep breaths. It was over now. Her leg was sore, and blood dripped down her arm. She used the bandanna around her neck to stop the bleeding. Next problem. One look at her leg and she knew it was useless. She needed parts and tools if she was going to fix this. There was nothing more she could do for that, she'd just have to grit her teeth and bare it. To her left there was a large bone, white and picked clean. She stared at it for a moment considering. It wouldn't be too bad, plus she couldn't hop the entire way back to city.

Soon August was ready to leave. Makeshift crutch, check, retrieved wrench, check, secured bandanna, check. A guttural roar filled her ears. It sent shivers down her spine and dread to the pit of her stomach. Her head snapped to the beast, it lay on the ground where she had left it. Still and motionless. Yet that sound was too familiar. It was coming from somewhere deeper in the cave and against her better judgement she headed towards it. The light was dim here, it reminded her of the smoke in the city. The tunnel stretched on with never ending darkness crushing from both directions, until finally it opened into a wide expanse. Light filtered in

through an opening in the rocks above. It bathed the cavern in a new morning's orange light.

August couldn't take in the magnitude of beauty before her. She couldn't appreciate the lush green ecosystem down here. It was suddenly all too much, and she ran, half limping back down the tunnel. She swept past the corpse of the beast and out into the trees. With the light now returned she saw a glimpse of the road through the foliage and she ran for it, Fearing road, then where? She didn't know. Just away from here. No vehicles came down the road, no soul did either as she frantically ran. She coughed as she entered the smoke covered city but continued despite it. Further away. She needed to cross seas to get away from this.

"August? August is that you?" The voice loomed out of the smog. It came from a very worried Walter standing on the corner of eleventh. "Is that a bone?" he said incredulously as she came closer.

"I had to get away, and my leg was useless, and everything was hurting then I was just running the sun was out but it didn't help and I don't know what to do-"

"Woah, slow down there. Let's just get you to a doctor who can help with your arm." He nodded at the blood-soaked bandanna.

"No, you don't understand," she cried out and fell. He leapt forward and caught her before she hit the pavement. Her hold on consciousness was wearing thin. If she was going to say it, she had to say it now before she passed out. "We have to get away from here, everybody does. We are all in danger, there are more of those creatures, a whole army of them in a huge cavern and I think that I just killed their gatekeeper."

Wheelchair man

By Doug Moss

It's late September in Ft. Worth, Texas 1987. The temperature has finally cooled somewhat from the long hot summer and football season is getting into full swing. The nice weather allows two Fort Worth Police officers to drive through the downtown area in their patrol car with the windows down. The officers are in a special unit that conducts foot patrol throughout downtown. They drive through town first to see if there are any obvious problems. The officers are Doug Moss and Ernie Hammons. Moss is a white male about six foot tall, medium build. He's thirty three years old and has brown hair, a mustache, and green eyes. Hammons is five foot eight inches tall and heavy set. He's not overweight just thick boned. He's thirty four years old and has prematurely gray hair. He has brown eyes and a mustache you can barely see because it's thin and gray. Moss was born and raised in Texas, but Hammons is from Detroit, Michigan.

They cruise through the downtown area at six thirty in the morning. The sun is rising, and people are flowing into downtown to start their workday. The officers cruise the better part of downtown when Moss says, "Let's go check the shelter and then we'll walk for a while."

Hammons acknowledges, "Yeah, sounds good."

The officers cruise out of downtown about a half mile to the Union Gospel Mission Night Shelter. It's a shelter for the homeless. There's usually some kind of trouble there so the officers cruise by in the morning to make sure everything's alright. They drive down Lancaster Street which is a main

artery out of downtown. After several blocks they approach the night shelter. As they arrive there's a large number of indigents standing along the curb and lined up against abandoned buildings. The Shelter kicks everyone out in the morning but they don't go far. The police unit comes around the corner to the front of the shelter. There is a small grassy area in front. Moss see's someone laying in the grass, "What the hell is that?"

Hammons stretches his neck, "Is that a person?"

Moss pulls the car up to the curb and the officers exit the vehicle. They walk up to the subject laying in the grass. He's a small Mexican man with no legs. Even if he had legs, he'd still be small. He's filthy and disheveled. The officers stand over him for a few seconds and Hammons says, "He's got no legs." He then turns to the guy on the ground who is just waking up and groggy and says, "How the hell do you get around?"

The guy looked up through glazed eyes at the officers and mumbled, "Like this." He took his hands and clawed at the ground. He pulled himself several feet and stopped, out of breath, "That's the way I do it."

Hammons turned to Moss, "That's terrible!" He then turned back to the guy on the ground, "Why don't you have a wheelchair?"

The guy languished on the ground for a few seconds and said, "Somebody stole it."

Again, Hammons turned to Moss, "That's pathetic. We've got to do something about this."

Moss was looking around at the population of homeless people in front of the shelter who were watching the officers jack with the homeless, legless, Mexican guy. He turned to Hammons, “Let’s talk to our buddy at United Way and see if we can get him a wheelchair.”

Hammons agrees, “Yeah, sounds good.” He then turned to the homeless guy, “What’s your name?”

The guy answered, “Robert Rivera, they call me Birdie.”

The instant Rivera said Birdie both officers realized how he got his nick name. He looks like a bird. He’s got a long-curved nose like a beak and little bitty facial features along with jet black hair and brown eyes.

Hammons says, “Okay. We’re going to get you a wheelchair and you’ll be able to get around. Sound okay?”

Rivera looked at the officers skeptically, “Yeah. Sounds good to me.”

Hammons reiterated, “Stay right here. We’ll be back.”

Rivera was kind of a smart ass, “Where am I going to go?”

The officers left the area and immediately drove to United Way headquarters in downtown Fort Worth. They entered the offices with ease because they were well known amongst the staff. They went straight up to the head office of Tarrant County United Way and talked to the man in charge. After telling him the story he made a few phone calls and sent the officers to a handicap company in the downtown area.

The officers arrived, and the workers had an old used wheelchair ready for them to take custody of. They put the chair in the trunk and drove straight back to the homeless shelter. When they arrived at the shelter, they notice Rivera was still there but had apparently drug himself further up towards the building in the shade. It was beginning to get hot.

Moss and Hammons got the wheelchair out of the trunk. They rolled it up towards the building and presented it to Rivera. He was laying there on the ground and looked at them dumbfounded. They helped him up into the wheelchair and he seemed at home. He sat there for several minutes looking at the officers. He rolled the wheels back and forth and spun the chair around in a three sixty without moving an inch in any direction. He appeared to be almost ready to cry, "Thank you. Thank you."

Hammons, ever the police officer curious type, "How did you lose your legs. Were you in the war?"

Rivera just looked at the ground, "No, I lost them in a car accident when I was a kid."

Now both Hammons and Moss were looking down at the ground when Hammons said, "I'm sorry. I'm glad we could help."

Moss told him, "Just enjoy it. If anybody tries to take it from you give us a call."

Rivera continued, "Okay, thank you. Thank you."

The officers went back to the car and left the area feeling quite full of themselves. It's rare in police work you get to do something where everybody wins. Hammons was especially

pleased with what they did, “This job sucks a lot but getting the chair makes you feel good, right?”

Moss was also in a good mood, “Yeah, we did a good thing. I’m glad he can get around now. We did our good deed for the day. Let’s get something to eat.” The officers finished out the day and went home for the night.

The next morning the officers came in for foot patrol duty and did their normal routine through downtown Fort Worth. After cruising the area, they parked the car and began walking on foot. They walked until about nine A.M. and decided to take a break. They walked towards the Hyatt Hotel in the middle of downtown. As they approached the hotel a call came over the radio from the dispatcher, “Any unit close to the Hyatt Hotel. We have a disturbance in progress. Any unit who can respond.”

Moss immediately grabbed his handheld radio, “Paul three sixteen and Paul three eighteen are a minute off.”

Paul units are the designated foot patrol units (typed as P-316 and P-318).

The dispatcher came back, “ten four. There’s a man in a wheelchair in the lobby of the Hyatt causing a disturbance. They request officers immediately.”

Moss acknowledged, “Ten four. Put us on the scene. We’re walking in the lobby now.”

Moss and Hammons walked in the lobby and observed Rivera in his wheelchair sitting in the middle of the lobby yelling obscenities at everyone. He rolled over to a well

dressed man and woman and yelled, “Hey motherfuckers why don’t you give somebody a chance! Give me some money!”

When the couple moved around him quickly, he approached two older men in business suits, “How about you. You got something for a legless man with no home?”

These were dignified people in suits and dresses who were basically being assaulted by this crazy man in a wheelchair. The officers were shocked. They approached Rivera and Hammons said, “Birdie! What the hell ya doin?”

Rivera turned and saw the officers and got a big smile on his face, “Hey guys! How’s everything going?”

Moss walked right up to the wheelchair, “It was going great until now. What the hell are you doing. You can’t come in here and start yelling at people. This is a high class hotel.”

Rivera just laughed, “Yeah, I know. I’m really shaking them up, right?”

Hammons walked around behind the wheelchair and started pushing Rivera towards the exit. Rivera began yelling, “Hey, whaddya doin!? I don’t want to leave yet!”

Moss waked along beside the chair, “Yeah Birdie, it’s time to leave. You can’t stay here, or you’ll be in jail.”

Rivera started grabbing the wheels of the chair trying stop the eviction, “No! I don’t want to leave!”

Moss got down in his face, “Birdie, you’re leaving or you’re going to jail. You decide.”

“Take me to jail! Go ahead, take me to jail!”

Both Moss and Hammons got the chair outside and just looked at each other. Finally, Hammons said, “What do we do?”

Moss was pissed off, “Throw him in the back seat and put the wheelchair in the trunk.”

They got in the car and Hammons was wondering what they were doing, “So, we taking him to jail?”

“No, we’re taking him to the shelter and dropping him off. Can you imagine how pissed off the jail lieutenant would be if we brought a wheelchair guy to the jail. We’d be chastised forever. I’m kind of understanding why they stole his other wheelchair. I think maybe we opened up a can of worms.”

The officers drove Rivera back to the shelter and put him out on the front lawn in his wheelchair and drove off. It was alright. Tomorrow when the officers came to work everything would be fine.

The next day the officers arrived for work and began their tour of downtown. They drove by all the hot spots and then got out to walk. Their job was to walk around downtown and talk to the businesspeople. It gives them a sense of security. After about an hour and a half the dispatcher came over the radio, “Any unit close to the Hilton Hotel. There’s a disturbance in the lobby.” She was hoping a foot patrol unit was close, so she didn’t have to use a regular patrol unit. Moss looked at Hammons. They were about two blocks off. Hammons took his hand-held radio, “Paul three eighteen and Paul three sixteen, we’ll take that call. We’re a couple of blocks away.”

“Ten four both units enroute at zero nine seventeen hours.”

The guys walked to the Hilton in another minute and called the dispatcher to tell her they were on the scene. As they entered the Hilton lobby people were leaving at a quick pace. Actually, people were running out of the hotel. Moss and Hammons continued to walk through the hotel looking at each other fearing what they may find. They both had funny feelings in their stomach as they approached the main lobby and heard a familiar voice yelling, “Hey! Motherfuckers! I have no legs! I need money! Who’s going to give me money!”

Moss and Hammons did not hesitate, they walked up to Rivera and Hammons again grabbed the wheelchair and started towards the exit. Birdie again protested his removal, “Stop it! You can’t do this to me! You’re arresting a poor legless man!”

This was another high-class hotel, and the patrons were disturbed by the fact someone was in the lobby yelling about giving out money to a legless man and the fact that the police were being brutal to a poor man with no legs in a wheelchair. Moss and Hammons didn’t care how it looked. They did not need this aggravation. After all foot patrol was supposed to be a gravy job. Both Moss and Hammons had put their time in patrol in one of the highest crime cities in America and now they must put up with this wild card.

Hammons rolled him outside and both he and Moss stood there while Rivera cooled off for a few seconds. All three caught their breath. Moss and Hammons were pissed. Rivera was laughing, “Y’all don’t know what you’re doing do

you?” It was hard to get mad at the guy. He was a nice guy with a sense of humor but then he went crazy in the high-class hotels. It’s obvious this could not be tolerated. The feeling of security for the downtown people was beginning to fade.

Hammons looked at Moss, “Maybe we should take him to jail this time.”

Moss was adamant, “Nope. We’ll take him to the shelter, and he’ll be done for the day.”

The boys took Rivera back to the shelter and dropped him off. They continued their patrol of the downtown area.

As they cruised Moss said, “Maybe we should consider getting rid of old Birdie.”

Hammons slowly looked at Moss, “What do you mean?”

“I don’t know. Let’s talk to our buddy Jim at the bus station. Maybe we can send him out of town on an extended vacation. If you know what I mean.”

Hammons head whipped around, “That’s a great idea. We can send him to some other city and let him live in their shelters.”

“Yeah, we’ll talk to Jim tomorrow.”

The next day the officers went straight to the Greyhound bus station. They found Jim throwing luggage onto an outbound bus. Hammons approached, “Hey Jim, how’s it going? We need some help.”

Jim turned around with a big smile, “Hi guys, what do you need?”

“We need to send a guy to another city at a very cheap price, one way.”

“Well, step right over to my counter and let’s see what we have.”

The three men went over to the ticket counter and Jim began checking over the schedule and prices. He suddenly looked up and smiled, “I got a one way ticket to Waco for twenty seven dollars.”

Moss and Hammons looked at each other smiling. “We’ll take that one. What time does the bus leave.”

“Uh, it leaves at thirteen ten hours, that’s one ten to you civilians.”

Hammons nodded slowly, “That’s just about right. Let’s go get him and inform him of his trip.”

They both went through their pockets and came up with the necessary twenty seven dollars. They grabbed the ticket and set off to find Birdie.

The boys left the station and started circling the downtown area. They knew it wouldn’t be long before a call went out involving Birdie. Sure enough, about eleven fifty hours a call came out at an exclusive downtown liquor store. A disturbance involving a man in a wheelchair. Moss and Hammons have found their man. They took the call from the dispatcher and raced to the liquor store to find Birdie in full form. He was sitting in the middle of the store yelling obscenities at all the hoity toity business people shopping for their evening liquor consumption.

Moss and Hammons walked in and slowly approached Birdie with a big smile. They weren't upset this time because they knew what was going to happen. Birdie looked up, "Hey guys, how's it going?"

Hammons took charge, "Well Birdie, it's going great. We have got a great deal for you. When's the last time you did any traveling?"

Birdie thought for few seconds, "I haven't had a good vacation in a long time. What's it to you guys?"

Hammons pulled out the bus ticket to Waco, "You, my friend, have been chosen to go to Waco Texas free of charge. You'll even get twenty dollars spending money. What do you think about that?"

Hammons hadn't discussed the twenty dollar spending money with Moss and he winced at the thought but didn't say anything.

Birdie sat there a second and appeared to almost cry, "I don't know what to say. How did this happen?"

Hammons continued with the bullshit, "Well, there's a little known fund at the police department that helps people out. *You* are the person being helped by this fund today. It's a joyous day!"

Birdie seemed to be accepting an academy award. He started crying and thanking everyone, even the liquor store clerk, as Hammons and Moss pushed him out of the store. They loaded his wheelchair up in the trunk of the police car and put him in the back seat. He was so grateful. Moss made Hammons give him the extra twenty dollars since it was his

idea without asking. Moss told Hammons he'd buy him lunch later.

They arrived at the bus station and chit chatted with Birdie until it was time to load the bus. They informed the driver of Birdie's handicapped situation and put his wheelchair below with the bags and carried him on the bus. There were more thanking from Birdie and the bus was ready to leave. Moss and Hammons stood outside waved as it pulled out headed for Waco. They looked at each other and high fived as the bus disappeared towards IH-35 south. Both guys were feeling really good, their pain in the ass was gone. Moss said, "Okay, let's hit the Mexican Inn, I'm buying."

The boys spent the rest of the afternoon at the Mexican Inn eating and enjoying the peace and quiet of no wheelchair Birdie in town. All was right in their world.

For the next two days the boys went about the downtown area with only the usual small time calls. There was the stolen purse and the wino passed out at the courthouse. Mostly routine stuff. There actually was a robbery call at a downtown bank which turned out to be a wino with a piece of paper he gave to a teller saying he had a gun. The teller gave the guy the money because she was scared. Moss and Hammons picked him up about five minutes later walking down Commerce Street. He still had all the money on him, and they returned it to the bank as they took him in for just being a wino. Moss and Hammons later ate lunch at Whataburger downtown. They were doing police work as usual with no wheelchair man, "Birdie". It was nice getting back to their normal routine of scumbags and quick fix calls. This is what

they liked about working downtown. There was always a lot of things going on but nothing they couldn't handle.

The third day the boys came to work at six thirty in the morning. The businesspeople were starting to pour into the city. This was their time. They made sure everything was running smoothly as the offices of the big downtown buildings were stirring. Moss was driving down Commerce Street as everything was running smooth. Commerce Street is a one way street south bound. Moss was driving and he noticed something coming up the street towards him. There shouldn't be anything coming towards them. It was a one way street. He slowed and alerted Hammons, "What the hell is that?"

Hammons was now aware, "I don't know, it looks like a wheelchair."

Both men looked down the street closely. Moss stopped the car. It was a man in a wheelchair rolling full blast down the middle of the street with no regard for public safety. Both men got a sick feeling in their stomachs. Moss and Hammons at the same time Yelled, "Son of a bitch!"

About that time Birdie pulled his wheelchair up next to the driver's side window of the Fort Worth police car with a big smile, "Hey guys, how's it going?"

Both Moss and Hammons were staring at their nemesis. Birdie was wearing a baseball cap. The baseball cap was navy blue with big white letters, "Waco PD" on it. They were foiled. The Waco PD apparently figured out what they'd done.

"Son of a bitch!" Moss yelled, "They sent him back!"

Ah yes, the Waco Police have a sense of humor. Birdie continued with his infectious smile, “Those guys in Waco are really nice. I spent a few days down there and then they said they would pay for my trip back home, and here I am!”

Birdie was all smiles as he rolled off north bound on a one way south bound street. He was rolling right down the middle of the street with cars coming at him and honking. Moss just put his head down for a second in defeat. He then looked up and accelerated away from the area in a hurry. Hammons was also in shock, “What do we do? Do we need to go get him?”

Moss just turned on the lights and siren and left the downtown area, “Nope, we’re leaving. I think a patrol unit needs to handle the situation. He’s in traffic. We’re foot patrol, right?”

Hammons nodded, “Yeah, I agree. Let people in cars handle the situation.”

Hammons started laughing and Moss asked, “What’s so funny?”

“I would love to have seen those Waco PD guys face when they asked him how he got there, and Birdie said these two real nice Fort Worth Police bought me a ticket. Can’t you just see the light bulb in their head go off. They must’ve been so pissed at us.” And he laughed louder.

They were outside the downtown area and Moss turned off the lights and siren and proceeded out West Seventh Street to a little café. They called the dispatcher told her they’d be out eating. The dispatcher took them out of circulation. They could not get a call. Only two minutes later

the dispatcher comes on the channel, “Frank one fourteen, Frank one sixteen (designated F-114, and F-116) copy call. Copy signal fifteen, disturbance at the Hyatt hotel. A man in a wheelchair yelling at customers.”

Both F-114 and F-116 acknowledged the call. Moss and Hammons sat back at the café and ate a great breakfast of over easy eggs, pancakes, and bacon knowing what the following days were going to bring. Birdie became part of their routine. They made the rounds in the morning and answered a call or two a day on Birdie. The boys would show up and have some banter with him before rolling him back out in the street. He was a good guy; he was just crazy. This went on for a month or so and then Birdie just disappeared. No one knows where he went or what happened to him. That’s the life of the crazy homeless person. One day they’re running roughshod over your district and the next day they’re gone. The thing is anything could’ve happened to him. He could be dead, he could have decided to go back to wherever it is he came from, hell, he could have had some millionaire feel sorry for him and put him up in a mansion. One old homeless guy had a long lost daughter come get him and fly him from Dallas/Fort Worth to Los Angeles to live with her in multi-million dollar beach mansion. You never know. It just goes to show you, no good deed goes unpunished. I think back on him once in a while and wonder what happened. I’m concerned if he’s dead, or if he still has a wheelchair. He was a pain in the ass, but he was still a good guy. Dealing with so many homeless people gives you a new perspective on the human condition. Dealing with Birdie was a unique experience but myself and Officer Hammons gained many things from him that I still think about to this day.

Nocturne

By Michael Igoe

I am a sailor boy
who holds hands
with a china doll.

All of my friends
vast in numbers
live in big cities.

When I'm dreaming
I become anguished
in a shade of yellow.

I might have had
times I was calm:

I don't remember.

There was no report
in the way of sound.

From those weapons
they use on the river.

Their claim is a fight for all:
they're solemn men-at-arms.

I Age

By Michael Lee Johnson

Arthritis and aging make it hard,
I walk gingerly, with a cane, and walk
slow, bent forward, fear threats,
falls, fear denouement—
I turn pages, my family albums
become a task.
But I can still bake and shake,
sugar cookies, sweet potato,
lemon meringue pies.
Alone, most of my time,
but never on Sundays,
friends and communion,
United Church of Canada.
I chug a few down,
love my Blonde Canadian Pale Ale,
Copenhagen long cut a pinch of snuff.
I can still dance the Boogie-woogie,
Lindy Hop in my living room,
with my nursing care home partner.
Aging has left me with youthful dimples,
but few long-term promises.

MARKING TERRITORY: FEDERAL BUILDING, WESTWOOD

By Bill Cushing

Sprouting out of the ground,
this modern monolith with tinted windows
lets the State look out but prevents
citizens from peering in:
always the ruling classes' preference.

Yea, though I walk through the valley
of high rises, I avoid the anthropophagy
of my age, for the erosion of time
destroys and smooths while people carve
family crests into wooden doors

like businesses with the impudence
to place their logo in the lintel
or set their name in mosaic tiles
at a building's entrance as if they
will forever remain in this place

when eternity rests in men surrounding
tables in the shade. They pass their days
moving dominoes, each one the same
in his tendency to being worthy of life
by not clinging to illusions of eternity.

Mile Markers

By Jeff Lincoln

When you're young it's fun to laugh at age
Then one day it's not funny
Like feeling rich on payday
Five days later out of money

If you can move don't sit
Running tops walking too
More than enough evidence to know
That bell you're hearing tolls for you

Get it started to make halfway
Crawl to the finish if your legs go bad
Don't push around the future
'Cause Tomorrow might get mad
You wanna wallow or just lounge around
But believe it we are paying by the pound
Go out and solve a problem
Get more than just a tan
One day you're out of mile markers
And that's the highway plan

If That's a Duck, I'm a Pomegranate

By CL Bledsoe

The greatest power some of us have is nursing our dying plants back to life. Someday, they'll learn to complain, and it will be easier to remember to water them. The same could be said for any of us. When the rains come, it's a good time to do laundry. But avoid baths in case lightning comes through the pipes. No arms stuck outside windows. No mouths open with the windows down. Don't sleep in waiting room chairs or you'll asphyxiate and never wake. The poor have swords and are coming for the Lexus you can't afford to tune-up. The easiest way to make us forget the slow death is to convince us the little annoyances are deadly. That way, none of us will ask why they exist in the first place. How many of us have lost loved ones because they couldn't afford to keep living? Why it is every banker, every insurance agent, every business person in the country hasn't been strung up is beyond me. But it probably has something to do with fear of what the rope will do to our manicures we'll be paying off for months.

Life Enigma

By Peter Devonald

Spinning blue circles
hundreds and thousands of independent modules
programs and schedules, memories and plans
turn, whirr and grind
too many thoughts at once
too many open windows
to the heart of me

my operating systems forget forget
this wish to hold the universe together
to hold this moment together
fractured beauty, thousand flickering evocations
adjudications, coagulations and love songs
to live lives in the gaps between
two neurons firing

synapses overworking as sand clocks drain wisdom
nervous symptom overloads
fall too fast, softly, softly
with barely a sound
hour glass mocks us every wasted grain of sand
too much to do, too little
energy

another day wearily passes
spinning plates spiralling blissfully unaware
till everything collapses
no idea how to live at all
this weary dream
falling
sighing

an artificial lie of lines
thoughts repeated repeated
chronically fractured brain fog
manufactured minds
speak in many tongues
hold on, hang on, just be
spinning blue circles.

I thought

By Sohini Shabnam

I thought I'm done,
With all the feeling that
I have experienced previously.

I thought I can handle the pain
If it happens again,
Given by you again.

You never give me a single pain
I was the one who created it and then suffered alone,
Thinking you are the reason.

Believe me, after so many years
Still when I miss you,
The thought comes to my mind,
Will I be losing you again??

And that time
My heart bleeds.. just like
It was bled on our fresh juvenile years.

Yes, I thought I'm done
But actually, I'm not done
Rather I'm still in that dreamy world,
Flying with you, flying high and high...

no longer need you

by Linda M. Crate

you called me a succubus
because i enjoyed sex but you
didn't like it when i called you imp
because you enjoyed sex, too;

i don't understand why a man's
desire is seen as natural and why
a woman's desire is condemned—

why should i have to keep my longing
to myself based on my gender identity?

seems silly to me that we have all these
gender norms when gender is nothing more
than a human construct to uplift some people
whilst putting others down,

i understand my power now and i am no longer
afraid of myself so i will no longer swallow
down my magic;

and if we're honest you are more than a
mere imp, you're an incubus—

grew a new heart and soul so i no longer need you.

To not be:

By Chaymae Achami

Sometimes a feeling of emptiness hits you out of nowhere.

All of a sudden, your eyes water.

You were fine a few seconds ago.

Everything is fine but you feel the weight of the world on your shoulders.

You feel as if you're about to vanish at any moment.

Time isn't real... Life isn't real... Nothing's real.

You feel like you're an illusion living an illusion.

You question existence.... Life?

You don't want to know,

You just feel like you want to stop it all.

Stop the existence of everything and anything

Put the entire universe into a state of emptiness...Calm and nothingness.

You just want to make it all stop.

Like to a magic spell, you want to whisper:

“Let there be no humans, no particles, no space dust, no galaxies, no infinity....”

Just complete pure Silence.

How magical would that be?

How magical would it be to not be at all!!

you're just not worth it

by Linda M. Crate

i came to you,
melting away the cold
in my wake;

and then it felt like you appreciated
my magic—

when we kissed that autumn,
the leaves danced around us;
and i took that as a good omen as autumn
has always been my favorite—

but who knew taking a chance
on you would be something i would regret?

i am only glad that you allowed me
to make some new friends i otherwise
wouldn't have had,

but i wish i could take back the first
time we kissed and held hands;

wish i could warn that girl that you're just not worth it.

She kept her secret in the dark room

By Alaa Abd Al-Hadi translated by Ahlam Othman



She kept her secret in the dark room
and decided
to wave her legs farewell
to neglect everything
to listen to the surface of the lake
to the disclosure of his oars
while searching inside
for a fallen fish.

The weight of consciousness

By Chaymae Achami.

Fully packed we walk
Exhausted with a burden
A burden we never asked for
Consumed of our soul
Unknown is the destiny
Mortifying is the future
I pray, you pray, we pray...
Let me not worry my soul
With unnecessary earthly artifice
Those which are crafted by
the demon like consciousness

Outline

By Allison Grayhurst

Too bad you got burned
on the spell of worldly accomplishments
and comparison, that you fell
into the snowbank and drenched yourself through.
Friendly false eyes in the flame,
in the sweating ruthless ocean - you lost
the hand that held you to truth and the longing
for a deeper betterment.

But now you are home, proclaiming
the invisible as your building blocks - piled high
and mortared together strong against every storm.
You almost got pulled into the everlasting pit, fooled
by fool's gold, but you reached the upper edge and
lifted yourself to a safe landing.

Eat from your bowl and be grateful.
Everything you asked for is already yours.
Walk away from the party,
shake hands, give uncommitted hugs,
then read by the dim light, knowing your true riches,
knowing all that you treasure is complete, thriving
in this compact tried-and-true family
and in the landscape of your evolving solitude.

The writer

By Prayerlife Nwosu

Longing to write a poem
One so rich and tasty
Full of imageries in stanzas
And alliterations in columns

Writing from my letter lines
Voices of my heart heard
Echoing from an empty mind
Full of less thoughts of hurt

Careless words of the wind
Speaking to words of my ink
With fonts of deep meanings
Left for the heart of a poet

There lies a bunch of thought
Captured by poetic instincts
What more is left by the window?
A basket of infinite ideas

Turning thoughts into words
Words of sage into texts
Turning texts into poems
Rigid poems of complex thoughts.

I am built of curses

By CL Bledsoe

after a line by Tony Mancus

Sometimes people yell when I'm out walking. They don't realize they're going too fast to be understood. I keep sweating, hoping for a little more change today, a little more tomorrow. But feelings get hungry and bored. I woke two years ago and I'm just now toddling from sharp edge to breakable thing. I'm trying. I've come so far to still be behind. I catch the man downstairs exercising on the sidewalk, most days. He says he has no room inside and tries to invite himself to my apartment. I tell him I don't have room either, which is why I walk. The truth is, I covet the routine of meeting him when I trudge home to do pushups and drip on the floor because I sweat better than him. His yappy dog. His adorable daughter. My creaky floor I tiptoe across. The weight—I didn't forget to stop eating, if that's what you think. You should be as ashamed as I've been all my life. Get out there and work to be normal. I'll drive by, but I won't yell. I already know there are voices far harsher drowning me out.

Hope

By Ayatullah Rabie

I fell in love with Hope.
I met her on the beach with her orange cat.
She was wrapped in a blanket of all colors and holding a cup of tea.
She introduced herself as Hope.
The one who lives in all humans' hearts and their fantasy.
She sat with me on a bench looking at the sea.
She shared her blanket with me.
Hope brought me a cup of tea.
Her presence was nice and warm and made me feel free.
One day she was in my heart and one day she fled.

Forsaken Mind, Forsaken Body_4

By Shanta Lee



KLITORY

By Iwuagwu Ikechukwu

Like a vandalized building beneath the blazing sun, she stood transfixed

Her face was damp, and dry as those of leaves scorched by the blazing sun

“Who are you?” I asked

“My name is Mgbeke, and I have a story to tell” she began

Emotions slithered down her cheek, kissing the earth in calm protest

“Everyone knows that girls cry” she continued

“Do you know the klit cries too?” I dabbed the trickle of tears that rolled down her cheeks

“One day it was...

The day I was
supposed to join my mates in high school

But mama asked that I stayed back, I was barely eleven;
innocent, and naive

“They are coming today”

Mama said, words escaping her lips on tactical limbs, like
cunning prisoners; gradually and steadily...

A cynical smile sat on her face like one scared of a chair
brought forth to sit on

I felt something was amiss, yes, I did!

The entrance door creaked painfully as it was yanked ajar

I saw Aunt Nene, alongside two other women

Their faces, thrones to drab miens – arid, vapid smiles

I embrace Aunt Nene, she smiled the same way mama did,
there was something unusual about her fragile embrace, I felt
safe and unsafe at the same time

‘The inner chamber is set’

Mama’s voice rang across the yard

Aunt Nene disappears with the women

Mumbled conversations engulf the pot of anxiousness boiling
in my mind

Mama reappears, walking like angel Gabriel on a mission to
herald John the Baptist’s birth

She takes my feeble hands and leads me towards the inner
chamber

Like a lamb about to be slaughtered

I felt like Isaac being led to the alter by Abraham

Laid supine – my eyes scan the ceiling for answers

Legs ajar like jaws of the great white in the deep blue sea

My eyes peek at the tray, bearer of blades of varying shapes
and sizes - models on the runway

The hot water vents its words of steaming anger besides me

The fears within me exit my pores on their trickling sweaty
adventure

I try to make away, my mass is held steady by arms of false
comfort

‘Relax, it will be over soon, I did it too when I was your age’

Aunty Nene reassured me with a smile, a genuine smile? No,
a smile as false as the truth of politicians

And the scalpel was made to kiss my klit

This kiss deluged my eyes with a fountain of pain

Everyone knows that girls cry

Do you know the klit cries too?

After a while,

I was asked to keep my legs ajar to allow the peppery comfort
of the billowing breeze

My eyes, stabbed vigorously by the innocent tears from my
klit – a garment to the floor

Now being licked up by the fabric's wooly tongue

My eyes a reservoir of flowing pain

My klit, in tears – red tears, red flowing tears

20 years after

This missing rib has been unearthed by a comely pair, and
now, ready for a dance

A dance I have heard of, imagined, and yearned for

A passionate dance on the nuptial sheets

But my klit still sheds a billion tears

Unseen tears from silenced sensitivity

Everyone knows that girls cry

Do you know the klit cries too?

Do you hear my voice?

Or is it choked by the watery limbs of tears?

There are other Mini-Mes scattered like stones at a
construction site

Soon to dance to the *marlian* beat of this weird culture

Everyone knows that girls cry

Do you know the klit cries too?

Your eyes are perching on these words like a dove on an olive branch

Because they feel the pain between every letter, every word, every sentence...

Be the voice, the dissonance anvil against this scalpel's dentition, before it kisses more klits

And when you see these Mini Mes, don't fail to give them priceless gifts

Give them

A VOICE!

Give them

JUSTICE!

Give them

FREEDOM!"

Death And Rebirth

By Ayatullah Rabie

I died a lot.

I died many times when I was a child.

The supermarket owner killed me when I was six.

because I wanted chips,

and he wanted sex.

Rebirth

My parents killed me when I was seven.

Because I wanted a home,

and I thought it would be heaven.

Rebirth

I died many times when I was a teen.

My teacher killed me once.

He made a scene.

Rebirth

A strange man on a bus killed me once.

Because I have a body,

and he has two hands.

Rebirth

I died many times in those past years.

The authority killed me a lot.

Because I want to live,

And they don't want.

Rebirth

Here are some of my many deaths and rebirths.

I'm a Phoenix.

I died many times,

and every time from my ashes I rise.

“Deep Darkness of Night”

By Muhammad Haroon Jakhrani

In the deep darkness of the night,
The world fades and dims from sight.
The stars above twinkle and glow,
While the world below lies quiet and low.

The world beneath blankets of black,
All peacefulness they lack.
Hushed whispers echo in the air,
A symphony of sound we shall not share.

The cool breeze hastens to and fro,
And the trees dance in its low.
A silence descends on the town,
As we lay low with heads bowed down.

The night sky reigns supreme,
A tranquil kingdom it seems.
And as we look up in awe,
Our fears and worries are all thawed.

For all looks divine in the night,
The world bathed in soft moonlight.

The twinkle of stars fills the eye,
A beauty that's hard to deny.

The world sleeps beneath the veil,
As the night watches without fail.
A time of peace and quietude,
And yet, we are never truly subdued.

For in the darkness, thoughts run wild,
As we ponder life, unbridled.
And though the night may seem long,
We know that the dawn will come, the light will belong.

So let us embrace the darkness of the night,
And bask in its beauty and delight.
For in this stillness, we may find,
A sense of calm and peace of mind.

The Wind Among the Reeds

By Sabiha Huq

I

The news was not surprising. Everybody was amazed though. The girl was mentally retarded. So what? She had flesh, right? And what do men on the prowl look for? Not the mind for sure! The more flesh one has to define the right curves and to highlight the appropriate contours, the more one attracts men. Rather grossly put, you might say, but well, plain things said plainly! A seventeen-year-old girl, with good health but with a mind of a three-year-old – quite an easy target for a possible predator. It was surprising though; she was living in a quiet house with a mother who looked after her. How could the mother let it happen?

Some even suspected her mother was having an affair with someone, and so she couldn't care enough for her daughter. After all, she too was virtually a single woman, for her husband lived abroad somewhere in the Middle East where he was a wage earner. Such men run the risk of a possible cuckolding by a young wife who would be unable to satiate her sexuality through virtual means like they say, over video calls. The newspaper did not say so though. The 'lovers' would be around – husband's brother, friend, cousin, neighbor; well, there was no end to count such men who

could willingly come of her aid, if she dropped the slightest hints. Or they'd even make much meaning of even her most innocuous words! Was it one of them who looked for a younger *Spermatozoa Ova*? Was it not the scientific name for the sperm cells? Were there different names for female and male sex cells?

The young girl's body was found in a nearby *beel*, the expansion of waterbody around the village where they said the best sweetwater fishes in the country grew. She held in her bosom a bunch of those reeds that had perennial existence in the water. She held the reeds in a way that was difficult for the people who rescued her body to separate them. They had to cut the reeds into pieces to disentangle her. It was rumored that she was taken there by a *djin* which captured her soul since childhood. What kind of *djin*? The ones Rushdie portrayed in his story of Luka? Or the ones we find in every nook of every village in Bangladesh? The ones living in the *Sheora* or *Asbath* trees? Why would it take her to the waters? Was it not easier for it to hang her from one of those trees and give her respite from ignominy?

II

“Ammool!”

The baby was calling her again! Fatema was glad it was talking again. She was so nervous when they said the baby needed to be killed. It was an illegitimate child of a man who would not marry her. She did not know what marriage was, but perhaps she would have to go through all those rituals again. He hurt her, perhaps he wanted to hurt her more had she not let him penetrate her. She did not understand what was happening. Nobody ever gave her anything in life, and all of a sudden, she got so many chocolates and beautiful bangles from him that she was overwhelmed with happiness. The advances he was making seemed to her a part of his kindness, the soft touches on her body were giving her so much pleasure, of which she had no sense of right or wrong. But then the piercing pain all of a sudden!

“Ammoo!”

She heard the baby calling her again. Where was it? Why could not she see it? Ah! There it was, there, in her swollen belly. Mother was so worried and angered when she vomited the first time. She could not understand why mother was shaking her weak body so dreadfully. It could be indigestion, but when she started throwing up after every meal, mother became suspicious. She shook her violently and asked,

“You fool! Tell me who did what to you! When did it happen?”

It was beyond Fatema’s wits to understand what she meant. Dadi came to her aid,

“*Bubu*, tell me, did any man touch you? Did any man do something bad to you?”

Fatema could not understand what Dadi meant either. Who would do bad things to her? She looked at Dadi with her big eyes, without any earthly expression on her face. Dadi frustratingly told her mother,

“*Boo*, what is the use of scolding her? She does not understand anything. Better take her to the thana hospital tomorrow. *Daktarapa* can detect the thing.”

Hearing of *Daktarapa* she was so afraid. The lady doctor was a real terror for her. Why would they take her to that hell of a woman. She would look into her mouth to pick stuck-in chewing gums, would inject her every now and then, would ask her to show her tongue full length and scold her for not brushing properly.

She went under the big bed in her mother’s bedroom. Many afternoons were spent here under this bed with her cloth dolls. She was not as dumb as they thought herto be. She

could overhear every word her mother said about her father having an affair with a co-worker in a place called Dubai. Where was it? Father said they had big cars and huge buildings. He also said they had made a world map with islands in the ocean. What was a map? She wanted to ask mother, but she did not dare disturb her while she talked over phone. She was perhaps talking to her cousin in Noakhali who wanted to borrow some money from her. This Mama (maternal uncle) was a very nice person. He never came empty handed; always had something nice for her.

“*Aba re*, such a lovely child, but Allah knows why children suffer so much,” Mama would tell mother whenever he came home. His kind words would always make her teary and feel drawn towards him. Her father would have loved her in this way, had he been at home. Every time this Mama came home, she would run to greet him and would sit by him as long as he stayed. She would try to please him by bringing water, or biscuits from the tin, or bring her toys to play with him. Sometimes, his attention would be completely towards mother when she would show something father brought last time when he was home. Their new TV was one. Beautiful women talked and danced inside that box; and when Mama wanted to take it away mother did not agree because she was so fond of it. Mama said one should not keep such a thing

because it would make children irreligious and immoral. Mother did not agree and said there was nothing else at home that would entertain the girl. She was passing it on Fatema, though it was she who mostly remained glued to the TV. Mama then asked mother to take Fatema out from time to time to give her entertainment.

“You should take her out to relatives and neighbors.”

“Who would accept such a child cordially, bhai? She is not violent but she is irritating.”

“No, no, Fatema is very sweet. I will take her to the riverbank today. *Ki*, Fatema, won’t you come with me? Maybe we can have some *phuchka* by the riverside!”

Fatema was smiling from ear to ear. Of course, she would. That would be the best thing to do. How she longed to walk by the river in the evenings. She used to go with her father when he was here. They would enjoy the sight of the river in full spate, munch this and that, and come home well past evening. With her father gone from here, now nobody takes her out on these strolls. They say she has grown too heavy and as she does not keep clothes on her properly, it is very embarrassing to show her to outsiders. Today she will dress up properly.

Mama took her to the other side of the *beel*. She was surprised. It was not the river! But it was even more beautiful with the water body swelled like the impregnated belly of Lali Khala (aunt). She saw her swollen belly before she gave birth to the cute little daughter. Mama took a boat from the many left there by the fishermen, and he rowed and rowed until they came to a quiet nook of the little *char* or island that had raised its head since a few months. It was a lovely place. Reeds grew everywhere. There were lily and beautiful white unknown flowers of floating plants.

Fatema did not understand why she was given so many chocolates at a time. Mama told her he would ask her for a favor, and she must not tell anyone of this. She was munching a chocolate at that time. Mama told that the chocolate she was eating was a magic chocolate and if she says anything about what happens between them, the chocolate will turn into poison and she will die of vomiting blood. Fatema's blood chilled. She was feeling too cold and when Mama took her in his arms she was very comfortable. Then Mama said he had a secret disease for which he could never marry. He could cure the disease if only Fatema gave him what he needed. It was such a new feeling! His hands made her elated. She knew in her seventeen-year-old body but three-year-old mind that the beautiful women in the

magic box of the television were caressed in this way. His simultaneous talks and strokes made her fall into a trance and she was surprised when he hurt her. A severe pain in her abdomen and thighs made her swoon. When she woke up, the evening had grown dark, and she still found herself in the moving boat. They were almost towards the bank on their side. Fatema was sad. She wanted to tell Mama that she would row the boat in their return journey, but it was too late now. Nor could she even manage to sit up properly, leave alone rowing.

Since that day Mama rarely came to their house. Mother did not give him the TV, that was a relief. She would never be able to stay without the beautiful women singing and dancing inside the box.

III

“She is pregnant! How is that possible!”, Daktarapa exclaimed.

“What to do, Daktarapa?”

Mother’s voice trembled and she was trying hard not to break down.

“It is too late for abortion. We’d be risking her life if we even tried it.”

“Then?”

“I do not know. Inform her father.”

“He will kill me. He will accuse me of being irresponsible.”

“Any idea who did it? Not that it matters, but still ...”

“No. she is always with me.”

Mother must have forgotten that afternoon when Mama took her out. But Fatema would not remind her. She had made a promise. And the poisonous chocolate! Besides, she could hardly conjecture so much.

But Dadi reminded her.

“*Bou*, I told you not to let her go out with that man. He never looked like a good man to me.”

“Ma, he loves Fatema like his own child. How can he do that to her?”

“*Moron!* Like his own child! He never had a child! How could he? His wife never lived with him. You are blind to his flaws, *Bou*. He is not even your own brother.”

“Ma, please, do not blame someone unnecessarily. Fatema goes out in the field sometimes to play. May be, some *chokra* (lad) did it.”

“I do not think so. She never got that much time for such an unfortunate thing to have happened.”

Father came home. His face clouded with shame and anxiety, but perhaps anger overpowered all else in his visage. He beat her like one beats a dog that has killed the only cock of the house. Fatema’s whole body bore the pain of beating for more than a week. Father beat up mother too, for she’d been inattentive of their daughter when he was far away from home in search of a living. Like most menfolk of the village, he too nurtured suspicions that she must have taken a lover to make do for his long absence, and had cared a fig for Fatema’s whereabouts.

“*Sboitan beti*, I will kill you and your *nagor*,” he screamed at mother. “What were you doing with your lover when the daughter was at it?”

Dadi would come to her on the sly with some warm oil and massage her body.

“*Bubu*, tell me, who did it to you? I will tell nobody.”

She perhaps understood what her grandma meant, what with having taken so much beating and undergoing such physical discomfiture. But it was safe for her to keep quiet. On many occasions she kept quiet and looked at people’s faces with such a vacant look that nobody dared ask her anything else.

That saved so many unpleasant conversations. But she could not save herself from the village headman this time.

“Aftab Mian, your daughter must be punished for this sin. Her child must be buried alive after its birth. We will not keep any illegitimate child in our village. And after the childbirth you daughter will receive a hundred *dorra* (whipping) and must leave the village.”

“Where will she go? She is a retarded child.”

“That is your business, not mine.”

Fatema listened with care. What did they mean? What will they do to the child? Her child? Will she have a child? Is there a cute daughter inside her swollen belly? Is she going to keep her daughter all day long like Lali Khala did? Will she feed her child from her breasts? She remembered how good she felt when Mama adored them. Now the child will suckle, just like she would see women in the fields giving suck to their young ones! All of a sudden, the half-wit girl Fatema seemed ecstatic with an instinctive feel of motherhood, though she had no idea of what it meant in society. In fact she could make no sense of the rage with which the embittered headman was growling at her father. The village elders too seemed equally agitated, and she could only make out a chorus saying “Kill, kill, kill”.

Fatema only gauged that something drastic was to befall her, she had supposedly done something unpardonable, of which she didn't have the faintest idea. When her father finally came indoors, having failed to pacify their neighbors, she gathered that they wanted to bury the child alive. What on earth did that mean? If she was to have a child out of her womb, why should the villagers want to kill it? Fatema had only seen her grandfather being buried when he died. So she knew that when one turned old and passed away, the corpse was to be buried. But why would they do such a thing to her child? Didn't they realize that her child would never be able to come out of the grave on its own? Would they bury a living being then? No, it must not happen. She would never let it happen. These people must all have gone crazy, she surmised.

It was however easier thought than done. After all, what could Fatema do? Would she rush to the hospital and have her womb slit open so that her child could be brought out? She had heard that Lali Khala's womb had to be opened up to bring out her child, else it would be difficult to save both mother and child. Doktorapa cut it. Lali Khala could not have done it herself. She would have died had she tried it by herself. Will she go to Doktorapa? But Fatema hated the doctor like anything, and she'd do anything under the sun to stay away from her. Could Lali Khala help her find a

solution? She had given birth a few years back, and must be knowing how to handle it all. Or should she go to Mama, this time not for chocolates but for help in peril when nobody around seemed to understand her? For sure, he was the one who must have known whatever's happened to her. He was a knowledgeable man and would perhaps have something better to suggest. Tossed in such thoughts, Fatema suddenly felt an urge to retreat to the placidity of the *beel* once again. The water and reeds there were so peaceful, so different from the hurly burly of the village. She needed to think clearly what was happening to her.

IV

The boat was hard to control, but she rowed quietly and with precision.

“Ammoo!”, the baby called again.

She was quite close to the spot. Such a beautiful gathering of red lilies and white weeds. Dragonflies were buzzing all around. The wind played its tune among the reeds. Fatema alighted from the boat, and held the reeds tightly to her bosom that had now begun to swell.

“Ammoo!”

“Yes, baby! Here we are again. Here we will play all day long. You and I. As we played in heaven.”

After some hours the wind blew among the reeds gleefully and the lilies were blushing with their bloodshot pink among the white tiny petals of weed.

Painting Flowers

By Fayrouz Ebeid

Open your heart,

I'll find my way in.

Your mystery welcomes me

with arms wide open

to drown me in your ethereal beauty

and wrinkling soul.

Your mystery tricked me

into thinking that I could figure you

out. But you don't have to tire your-

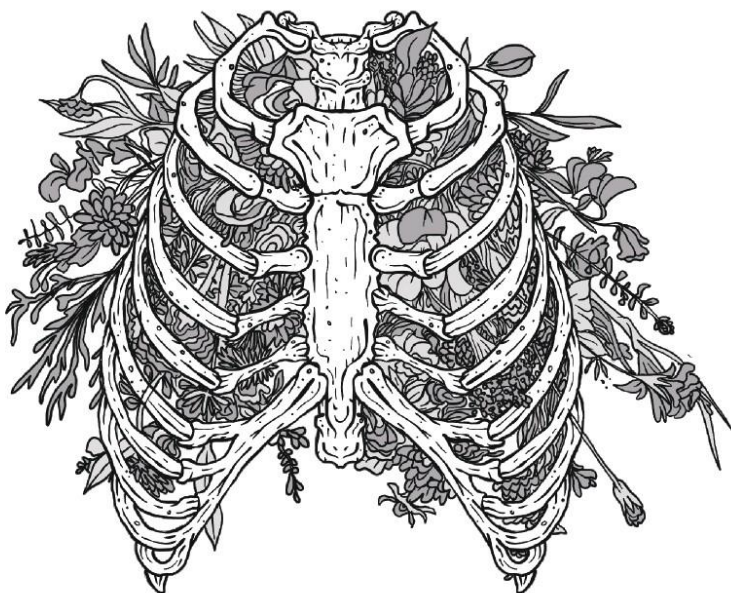
self. I'll paint flowers

beneath your ribcage and

all day, I will pluck their petals.

Painting Flowers

By Shehab Adel



Iron Fist (1)

By Antreka Tladi

After a woman has given taste
To a man's lust,
After she has given colour
To his bed
Like salt and flowers of this earth,
She'll be kept in a glass jar;
Disposable after use.

But first she'll be deprived of water
Until she's wilted and worn,
Her body will become a battlefield;
Battered, bruised and blemished,
Her face;
Blue eyed and bloodshot
Would learn to soak up
Iron fists,
Boot kicks
And bullet holes.

Like a punching bag
She would swing back and forth
Against the kitchen and bedrooms walls
That have become so cold and so quiet-
That her orphaned children
Will roam the dusty and dirty floors;
Last swept by their mama's hand
With tears in their eyes.

Standing in One Spot for Too Long

By Adam Barentine

I was 13 years into virginity
when I lost my spot in heaven.
It's a hole I've yet to claw from.
Today, I have a sense of a wider world.
My head grows higher
while my feet stay planted.
Stuck in a reflective puddle of reinforced humility.
Don't look down
or you'll see up my skirt.
Exposing the unsightly undercarriage
pieced together second-hand
into a collage of varying experiences.
One providing structure to the
hodgepodge of misaligned parts
that make up the life I've lived
for thirty years so far.
I placed my soul under a rock
and left it there for seasoning.
In another year or so,
I'll dig it up and scrape off the crust.
Then wretch at the moldy funk that develops
once your sweetness has fermented to sour.

Forsaken Mind, Forsaken Body_5

By Shanta Lee



Pregnant Clouds

By Abubakar Terkimbi Saidu

Very dark and hanging loosely in the sky,
Pregnant clouds turn dawn to dust!
Sending heavy, strong and dusty wind
From the desert like a moving train,
Sweeping people off their feet!
Uprooting and flinging not well rooted trees,
Squashing the birds' eggs in the nest!
And on goes the heavy, strong and dusty wind,
Cracking the branches of the well rooted trees!
And sending our roofs open and flinging them;
Flinging them here, flinging them there!
And the doors and the windows slammed!
Cracking the doors and the windows made of wood!
And shattering the doors and the windows made of glass!
Birthing rain by the pregnant clouds,
The clouds become white like snow;
Grumbling and rumbling and growling.

The poet

By Prayerlife Nwosu

Thou travel to the rising from a seat
To the abstract world thou send thy spirit
To fetch raw eggs of great sage
From a gradual eyes closure

To the beyond thy spirit journeys
Jumping hurdles of internal noise
Running out of distraction swamps
With a basket of focus as an antidote

Thy spirit hovers in search of sage
They float in large numbers in abstract
Thou pick one for a physical digest
As others keep floating in millions

To the world of reality thy spirit returns
Thy ink begins to bleed from her tube
As thy great ideas begin to hatch
And aided by the wind of inspiration

Thy ideas and feelings are turned into words
To calm human souls in need of a succor
To give them mind blowing rhymes
And to leave them swimming in a pool of smiles

Oh demigod with a pen sword
Thou press down bodies with thy ink
Though thy thought sometimes leek
Thou remain the succor to troubled hearts.

She

By Amany Mohamed Atia

I am proud to be, the pronoun she
Its not hard to see, the worth of me
With a will of steel, and soul that is free
I am a seed in a poor land
And grows beautiful flowers
That touches everyone's hand
I am a peace song to my children
Which they can hear and then
Be full of hope to wake up again
I am a hand holds the other
When everything gone
Brightens the path and warm
Like a glorious sun
So look around you
And give up your ego
Look how great civilizations
Are basically women's creation

Mary

By Phyllis Adams

Ice is thawing on winter's river,
cracked in places like broken shells.

Time will free the torn sheets,
or will they fuse again?

*

*We called them claspers when we were kids.
My brother and I would jump from one to the other.
We felt brave imagining what it would be like
being swept under in the cold black water.
“The consequences might not be awful,“ he’d say.
And so we’d dare and chance another
the ghostly tide at our heels.*

*Distant grew the space between us
when twilight turned the sky to dusk,
blackening the shadows in my soul
as death drifted beyond my grasp,*

*An eerie stillness stole my breath,
the night soft, like a cloud of mist,
while flesh perished on his bones,
quiet stayed the falling snow.*

I never knew such silence.

*

Mary follows the river's edge,
weighted still by frozen rock,
bawling like a hungry baby

searching for the swollen breast.
Snow melts off winter's roof,
while Lupins fight to breathe in air,
shouting, sprouting,
caught in gnarls of their roots.

*

*I look across the weakened river,
longing to be on the safer shore.
I have no brother to cling to
should I stumble and fall below.
His words echo beneath my feet,
“Never trust the thinning ice.”
My pleading voice begs to know,
should I stay or should I go?*

A Quarter

By Ayan Chakraborty

Rooms travel with months;
darker ones to the east and the slower ones to the north.
Liquid times. Liquidated times. So, the move. One haunt to the
other.

Here are the rains, withdrawing monsoons,
a difficult raconteur of sights and words , between them there
is Magritte's problem.
What we live through. What we live within. How we create life
out of it.

We had heavy heat this time. May, June, July.
Tired fences thinking about what they had skipped to let
changes in.
A hill trip. Where ghosts floated real. An exorcism deadly
enough to create soot.
On the ceilings of the world gone by. Loved, hated, forsaken,
exiled.
To make love real within two truths and no lie.

So much about speeding, so much on voices, so more about
fear.
So much more about keeping things to the safe.
Together.
There are new germs waiting to be raised below the October
sky.
In a city I love, hate, forsake, seek exile from.
Before the bells that drown out my prayers with the fire.

For you,

By Phyllis Adams

For you,

I would say goodbye to the land,
sail into the silent mist,
let the wind guide the canvas
to where the sea and sky meet the horizon.

For you,

I would remain forever drenched,
endure saltwater burns from the spray of the ocean,
and drift to the rhythm
of a gentle breeze brushing the sails.

For you,

I would readily rub my face against your unshaven skin,
run my fingers through your salt-weighty hair,
kiss the sun on your face,
close my eyes and embrace the unknown,
for you.

Intertwined

By Allison Grayhurst

Together like odours
that merge in a closed room,
blending indistinguishable,
we are continual - each the same
as the other - in plague breath, in worries,
and in peace-filled joys, hopes that restore
strength and future paths beautifully unfolding.

So we decorate inside, never letting on
how much care we give to each detail.
Truth is kind to us as we hold hands across
the sofa, smiling at each other because
there is no corruption between us, no hidden
regrets or festering resentments when we see each other
we see a gift of eternal faithfulness, a lifetime pact,
sure-footed, winged and light and rich as honey
on the tongue, as a friendship that has never betrayed
or grown stale, and a love in a constant cycle of aching,
being satiated, counting on satiation and thresholds
reached and surpassed, sensuously mastered
together, often weary, but never of each other.

Only you are my love, bound
like the stem to its flower,
and the hawk to its sharp eye.
We will give nothing to the rest
that does not join our great love,
tries to defile our green fields flowing
or make us believe in less than this miracle.
For all things of life are ours -
our veins, our holy light-strings,
intensely locked, tenderly alive.

Poem 1:

By Hoda Amien

Birds know not of this realm beneath the water,
fish know not of a perfect evening sky,
Ignorance saves you the suffering of nostalgia-
to places where you'd never in blink an eye,
and so does my Hummingbird fly,

And so does my Hummingbird fly,
soaring over carpets of a sea so dry,
sweet melodies evoked a raging wave,
it called out all her folks—
to watch my very own Hummingbird,
gold feathers with deep blue strokes,

In a foreign sea of doubts,
and a trail of skillful tones,
my Hummingbird is tearing down
a cloud of dreamy wistful thoughts.

And so it rained so heavily,
on our tiny realm down here,
but all the fish were busy,
With day-to-day dalliance.

The waves then got so angry
with my beautiful Hummingbird.
For it has shed its tones,
on sound unthinking folks.

For thoughts and tones were banned
in a realm that worships Hawks,
they live unharmed and safe,
beneath suffocating waves
of anguish and despair,
they thrive not in air.

What is Love

By Santwana Chatterjee

What is love if it does not give you pain,
What is love if it does not make you cry,
The more I love , I miss you more,
And feel incomplete,
Separated and left alone,
I want so much to be one with you
To be inside and not without,
Like the morning sun and its golden glow,
The silver of the moon,
The depth of the sea
And green of the meadow,
The crescendo where pain Melts in to pleasure,
I want you here in my soul,
A burning desire for Its own fulfillment,
A happy tune Melting into sadness,
What is love if it Doesn't take you
To the clouds in ecstasy ,
Make your heart stop Once o
Or goad you to fly into the sky,
What is love if it does not make you cry .

I Am Not a Performing Seal

By Daz Pearce

I am not a performing seal
you never quite could keep it real
No I am not a performing seal
I come as a package babe, not piecemeal

Oh yesterday you were so, so lovely
but today's vibe's unpleasant, ugly
Whatever I do you object constantly
hey, you were always lacking object constancy

Yeah, yesterday I proved myself, explained
but today I'll have to do it all again
Oh twinkle twinkle, little star
seems you've more red flags than the USSR

I am not a performing seal
you never quite could keep it real
No I am not a performing seal
I come as a package babe, not piecemeal

I am not a performing seal

you never quite could keep it real
No I am not a performing seal
should thank in advance for that big reveal

Cos yesterday I was the nuts, the one
but today's telegram says...get gone
Which side of the bed? I'm unwitting
In psychology sweetheart they call that splitting

I am not a performing seal
you never quite could keep it real
No I am not a performing seal
I come as a package babe, not piecemeal

I am not a performing seal
you never quite could keep it real
No I am not a performing seal
us humans are an all in out kinda deal

Fingers burned, lesson learned
and this minefield must be departed
Yeah fingers burned, lesson learned
when broken legged meets broken hearted

Fingers burned, lesson learned

emotional investment that never pays
Yeah fingers burned, lesson learned
I smoke a different brand of crack these days

Cos I can't fight this fucking phoney war
we make a preposterous pair
Was never that desperate to score
that I'd sweetly slalom the slopes of scare

Cos I can't fight this fucking phoney war
now I'm firing a distress flare
Some breakdown on the bedroom floor
and now there's eggshell fucking everywhere

Oh yesterday you demanded intimacy
but today you're no longer into me
Whatever I do you object constantly
hey, you were always lacking object constancy

When everything's become a move in a game
and now I'm numb to those words, names
You've weaponised love, weaponised sex
so I'd best go trash those titillatious texts

I am not a performing seal

you never quite could keep it real
No I am not a performing seal
I come as a package babe, not piecemeal

I am not a performing seal
you never quite could keep it real
No I am not a performing seal
cos love ought not require balls of steel

I am not a performing seal
you never quite could keep it real
No I am not a performing seal
hey perhaps I'm still not completely healed

I am not a performing seal
you never quite could keep it real
No I am not a performing seal
no worries if you no longer see the appeal

Good luck lovely, you might need it
cos one day the deck of cards will fall
It might be advisable to actually mean it
if you don't then please don't say it, at all

Crowds

By Aneek Chatterjee

Crowds I love to watch
silently from the roadside coffee table;
from my lonely window; from
my drowsy, thirsty eyes.

I see shades of color, faces,
rhythms; --- hasty, slow, eager and
hesitant.

I also roll on roads, cobbled, metaled
and melancholic.

Crowds teach me life, provide
colors and moods. And I frequently
observe in the crowd,
two sailing souls; ---
in clasped fingers.

CATALOGUE

By Bill Cushing

In recent days, I have been wondering
where to place all my previous loves:
do those who taught me to savor life
belong with stalkers who left notes
in strange places? Where do I tabulate
those who betrayed me? I feel obliged
to include those I betrayed, but how
do I classify those who, upon our meeting,
neglected or rejected me?

REMIND ME AGAIN...

By W Roger Carlisle

Remind me again of that day we first met
in the coffee shop, my heart stirred and drunken
imagining wonderful stories about our future,
stories that made us smile, forget ourselves.

Remind me how much we struggled later
to drink in the truth about ourselves.
How we longed for adoration,
failed and came back together, needed understanding,
grew each other up.

How wonderful to taste your richness and depth
after many committed years,
that I could only imagine on that first date.

First Date

By Nancy Lubarsky

The Grecian Cave reeks
of fried peppers and onions.
As we enter, aging posters
(the Aegean Mountains,
the turquoise coastline)
tilt toward the customers.
The owner waves to you,
points to a table. We
squeeze through the lunch
crowd, sit and make small
talk until the food comes. We
will have many years together,
but right now your sandwich
drips with grease and I bite
into a long hot from my
salad, try to smile as my
tongue shoots flames.

First Day of Treatment

By Hayley Charles

There's a lot they don't tell you about eating disorder treatment beforehand. "They" being the people who run the facilities.

There's a lot the others do tell you. "The others" being patients.

Intake coordinator: "You can't bring fingernail clippers or tweezers or razors. Patients might try to hurt themselves"

Patient: "You can't bring sharp things because a girl died after she slit her wrists and bled out. I heard another patient stabbed her dietitian in the leg when she got a meal plan increase."

Intake coordinator: "You can't have anything with drawstrings or shoelaces."

Me: "No tennis shoes? Why?"

Intake coordinator: "Correct."

Me: "Why?"

Patient: "You might try to hang yourself."

Intake coordinator: "We do not allow cell phones, laptop computers or other electronic devices. They distract from the process."

Patient: "We're not allowed to communicate with the outside world and tell them what a hell hole this place is. There is one landline and you're allowed 10 minutes per day. Unless you piss them off."

Intake coordinator: “Of course you’re allowed to go outside! We encourage patients to spend time in nature, it’s good for the soul.”

Patient: “Only if you eat all of the food they give you. Skip one bite though and you’re stuck in here until further notice.”

Intake coordinator: “Every patient shares a room and has their own twin size bed.”

Patient: “The bed has a very thin mattress and metal frame, similar to prison beds. You get one blanket so I hope you don’t get cold easily.”

Me: “I’m cold all the time. I bet you are too.”

Intake coordinator: “We do expect a full completion of meals and snacks. If you do not complete, you will be asked to supplement. If you will not supplement, we will be forced to take away privileges.”

Patient: “If you don’t finish your food, they make you sit in the corner and write an essay about why you didn’t eat.”

Intake coordinator: “We have challenge snack days where the patients are encouraged to support each other and everyone gets to eat a fun snack together.”

Patient: “It’s usually two full candy bars and a bag of chips or an entire pint of ice cream.”

Me: “In a non-eating disordered way, that seems kind of unhealthy. Also sounds like binge food.” Patient: “Yea.”

Intake coordinator: “We do have movie days where everyone gets to watch a movie together!”

Patient: "It has to be G rated."

Me: "I'm 29 years old."

Patient: "Everyone in the adult program is over 18."

Me: "Do we get to go on any outings?"

Patient: "Outings?"

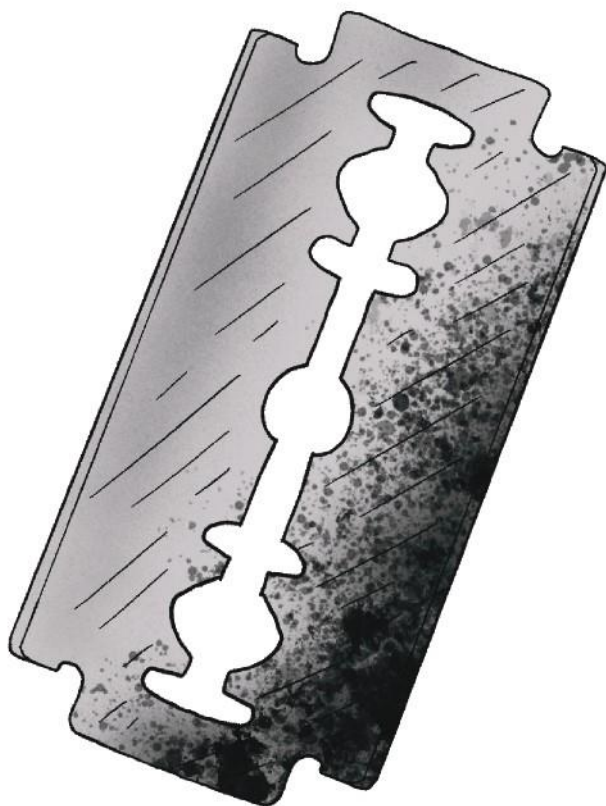
Me: "When you leave the facility to do something fun like bowling, getting ice cream or shopping." Patient: "No."

Me: "Well, I should be out of here in a few weeks anyway."

Patient: (Laughs) "Yea, we all thought that too."

Blades

By Shehab Adel



Blades

By Fayrouz Ebeid

My nostrils prickle with nostalgia

It is the smell of blood

again.

My love,

what have I done with

my vigorous blades this time?

My love,

is the blood on my knuckles

mine or yours this time?

Pasture

By Allison Grayhurst

I can see my mind in victory
over the clinging contaminating thoughts
that used to spiral in a vigorous loop
through my days even when in joy,
even when hearing a tambourine tune
rise up, happy and fresh.
Now those thoughts struggle to stand,
abandoned in a desert vast
and widowed. Dehydrated unto death
they sometimes whisper, but barely have a hold
or exert a reasonable authority.

My shame has packed its belongings and left.
My self-pity has reduced its wound
to a pin-prick along with my bitterness.
Gratitude is the only dream worth feeding.
I will feed it and not be overwhelmed
or react to desperate hungry
rumblings, not react in desperation
to what is lacking on the canvas, on the alter,
or in my understanding and this growing surrender.

The Great Reparenting Swindle (Part 1)

By Daz Pearce

She's looking for a brand new Dad
someone to make her happy
If not she might behave real bad
then YOU...go change her nappy

My love, it's not your fault
hey you're a victim not a vulture
You fell straight through the vault
of a totally toxic culture

All that material stuff
too much is not enough
when what you really require
is just a dash of unconditional love

Spend your formative years
chasing away the tears
but it ultimately transpires
he just wants to talk about his career

She seeks a superior caregiver
gives care in more than flickers
If not she'll cry you a river
she might just cry it in her knickers

My love, it's not your fault
hey you're a victim not a vulture
You fell straight through the vault
of a totally toxic culture

Those material possessions
and yet there's a regression

cos what you wanna hear
is that Mum-Daughter time is now in session

Mum need not be groovy
you just ask her 'soothe me'
but deep down what you fear
is she's too busy starring in her own movie

She's in the market for new parents
to placate her pre-teen angst
Or some other guardian variant
she might just drop that angst in her pants

My love, it's not your fault
hey you're a victim not a vulture
You fell straight through the vault
of a totally toxic culture

At twenty years old I got involved
what the fuck was I playing at?
Come twenty one, my head's still gone
here I am trying to herd cats
'Twenty two, think I'm on to you
might just finally know the score
By twenty three now you're chasing me
and I don't wanna know no more

You played me off against some other boy
you call us that, we're all the same
I turn out to be less than a sex toy
dispensable pawn, disposable game

Holy shit honey, heavens above
this runs deeper, wider, bigger
What I offered resembled real love
when you craved a quasi-father figure

My love, it's not your fault
hey you're a victim not a vulture
You fell straight through the vault
of a totally toxic culture

My love, it's NOT YOUR FAULT
hey you're a VICTIM not a VULTURE
You fell straight through the vault
of a totally toxic culture

I always sensed I was well hung
by the centrepiece, the spindle
Calling card Dazza, you've just been stung
in the Great Reparenting Swindle

I know this book, it ends in pain
yeah I've got it in my kindle
Transactional Analysis strikes again
in the Great Reparenting Swindle

Yeah...the Great Reparenting Swindle

Death Of A Friend

By Peter Devonald

Crazy weather crazy time
disappears
smoke in the ether of these days and ways.
Another week passes with barely a whisper
soundless shoes step away from cracks
anxious not to disturb the universe
this moment now
the unbearable now.

Seasons shift and change
waves rolls back
years, unbearable years
mirror in conjunction lies
reflections show the future far away.
Now is a memory shifting and turning its claws away
from us, we can barely hear ourselves speak in all the noise
and silence.

Our minds tick and turn yearning for simplicity
past times, before the change.
The weary world plays pontoon with lives
two aces split and split again, multiple lives
parallel games across seven billion light years
spread before our eyes
flashing lights and vanishing
eternity and our fragile little life.

Infinity and us, these years yawning decades
seconds in the vastness of our life
moments
mirrors no longer reflect me
already moved on, sifting
and spiralling and gone

restricted lives cherished, blessed
absent before they hardly began.

Unplug all clocks, pause everything
live impossible lives
disintegrating into meaning.
Eyes are portals whispering eternity
perpetuity in a flower
this moment, this hour
echoes experience
cherish, prolong, prevail.

Naïve sky!

By Alaa Abd Al-Hadi translated by Ahlam Othman



Naïve sky!

How come it has all these eyes and sees not!

whenever a bird fell,

space narrowed down

until the sky disappeared.

Another Week Another Illness

By J.M. Summers

The capsule is white on
one side, red on the other.
Care taken, unnecessarily,
over the design. It
goes down easier, she says,
with a beer, or two. Whisky.
Can't swallow it otherwise.
Does the blood sense that it
has been adulterated? Protest
the list of side-effects?
Blistering, discomfort.
Cure. This foreign body.
The instructions indicate to
take two on the first day,
and then one each day after.
Contraindicate alcohol
during the course of
treatment. New limits.
But just the one won't
hurt, will it?

Crypt in the Sky

By Michael Lee Johnson

Order me up,
no one knows
where this crypt in the sky
like a condo on the 5th floor
suite don't sell me out
over the years;
please don't bury me beneath
this ground, don't let me decay
inside my time pine casket.
Don't let me burn to cremate
skull last to turn to ashes.
Treasure me high where no one goes,
no arms reach, stretch.
Building for the Centuries
then just let it fall.
These few precious dry bones
preserved for you, sealed in the cloud
no relocation is necessary,
no flowers need to be planted,
no dusting off that dust each year,
no sinners can reach this high.
Jesus' heaven, Jesus' sky.

Note: Dedicated to the passing of beloved Katie Balaskas.

Red Bud

By Nancy Lubarsky

(originally published in *Howl of Sorrow Anthology*)

When you planted it years
ago, it was to teach our two
sons about care and tending.

They helped you trim the
branches each spring to
ease its growth upward.

I wish the storm had spared
that Red Bud – the single
gust that ripped the roots

and toppled it. Now, there will
be no more flowers. The boys
are older; they didn't notice
that the tree was gone.

THE SMILE OF RUSTING GOLD

By Iwuagwu Ikechukwu

*Only when the last tree has died, the last river poisoned,
the last fish caught, only then will we realize we can't eat
money ...Cree Indian Proverb*

Mother nature is an abode for all

There are no waifs

Her voluptuous breasts feed endless mouths, a milky flow of
fresh breaths, happy miens, healthy plumes, and mirthfulness

War looms on the horizon,

This war is upon us

A war between mother and children

Humanity's brainchild bares its intricate fangs against her

Orville's dragons, soaring chimneys muffle her lungs

Refineries speak in gas flaring tongues against the parliament
of the wind of the atmosphere republic - a coup underway?

The ozone's rind cries in peeling protest

A mockery of the weeping skies

Watch out, the south pole leads our globe to its submergence
beneath the icebergs melting secrets

Nuclear fields stifle her sandy skin with its aqueous flow of
doom, cotyledons bid farewell to the corridors of sprouting

Reefs nosedive to oblivion like torpedoed submarines

Aquatic lives recede with mankind's ritual dance of plastic deaths

Let's exhale the littering urge and embrace the smooth flow of recycling, like blood in our veins

Let's avail solar panels the chance to inspire windmills into billowing the breeze of greenness for

mother nature

She is priceless

Diamond, silver, or gold?

Which can equate to her alluring beauty?

Sadly, with the scarcity of appreciation and abundance of ignorance;

we keep mum whilst her rusting smiles.

The Last Conversation

By Ayan Chakraborty

It takes an hour and a half to reach the little kid.

The one who adulated into a comic sense of escape.

Picking up little battles under the yellow and honey house; his father spent a life and his mother an age into it.

They spoke too loud.

Of dreams and gardens, about thick glass windows and strong smelling paint.

But there was so much red around them that they didn't notice.

And in time, yellow dahlias got the axe and grew green into denser, unpruned savagery.

The stones were too cold even during spring time.

Slowly, they moved out. The child grown, his parents tired.

There's an ocean that drew breathe in between. The intoxication of twenty years. The dulcet tune of an unending, weird, beautiful theatre. He hates much yet most of it, he had loved.

The young man tries to reach out to the child for one last conversation. Through worn out beds, broken tiles and fallen plasters.

It would be his final escape. Once and for all.

One last conversation that would elude an eternity.

His watch stops.

It would cost a life in a minute.

Post-call

By Rana Elbowety

Outside, through the curtain,
sun rays touch crisp leaves.
Inside, mid-winter,
I lay awake recalling
his voice today,
a soothing familiarity
from over three thousand miles away.

The world often seems incapable of sound,
or dwindles into utter quiet
a little after we hang up, unbound.
Despite the distance, I can hear
liquid into the cannula seeping
straight into his blue veins.

In weeks, his arm will bear the marks
of a tired battleground.
I pat myself, his image in my head,
unable to translate to the world
a wistful lament
for all that will never be said.

Vacant

By Aneek Chatterjee

I stare vacant out of the window.
The 'Kaath Chanpa' tree has a bloom
this season. White flowers with
yellow tinge inside, draw me closer.

Sometime, I am vacant; like the
vast sky above, like stones surrounding.
The bunch of poems I wrote about
white flowers, you
and put closer to my heart,
now stare at me, vacant,
yellowish.

Flavoured (2)

By Antreka Tladi

Back then in my time,
Black education didn't fit
In a leather made backpack,
Instead I carried it
In an empty Tastic rice bag
Or a yellow Shoprite shoppers bag.

I brought firewood to school
From my mama's thatched hut
To cook it up like bones,
All three hours sizzling and boiling
In a black three foot pot
Upon a blazing fire,
Before it would be stuffed in my mouth.

I hanged an enamel mug
Upon the lapels of my khakhi shorts,
Just in case it came as liquid
So that it may be poured down my throat,
Chill cold and sugarless.

But it was in that tasteless
Pouring, stuffing and feeding
That I learnt to turn myself into a flavour,
For a nation that tasted of oppression and injustice.

Hush!

By Ayatullah Rabie

Walking on glass on the paper house.
Any wrong step and it's doom.
A war within three rooms.
The water is always too much or too little.
It's raining, or is it the sounds of my tears?
What about the lights?
No, turn off the lights.
But I can't see.
Stop complaining, you can.
But it's dark here.
No, you just are in fear.
But I feel suffocated.
Stop acting and live like the others.
No one is living here,
only you.
Is surviving like living for you?
Too many questions!
Why are you arguing?
Can't you nod in silence like the others?
But no one is living here,
only you.
Hush!

FEEDING RITUALS

By Bill Cushing

To help him cling to life,
she postpones her own.

A tube grows from his side,
a sapling's trunk

that pumps pulpy food into him.
She serves this sacrament

twice-daily, then washes
away her tears as she

washes out the hose that
allows her father to breathe.

Breath

By Brian Michael Barbeito

I go through from inside to the outside deck via the automatic doors of an impossibly large ship. Just beyond handsome wooden slats beige that meet white painted wrought iron dividers topped with a teak rail, are nothing but waves, the waves of the salt sea. I sit down and watch the horizon line. Some birds appear birds that are tropical and that follow the ship. I wonder then where and when they rest, and it puzzles me. I sit in a chair with faded orange cushions. A woman comes out and her dress is long and is a print decorative and unapologetic.

The wind makes it to dance.

I wish I had a camera, she says, because I would get you take a picture of me. My dress is part of the wind and I look like a bird. Can I sit next to you? I don't want to bother you.

Sure.

The woman says she is from the Carolinas now, but lived most of her life in New York City. *I am no Southern Belle.* Her intonation denotes that she is not below such, but rather more expansive, even cosmopolitan.

She remains on my left. A man approaches from the right but I don't see him. She does. She says to him, *You are one fine man. I have had my eye on you. And what a head of hair. Every time I lay my eyes on you I can't take them off. Other men just don't compare.*

I look over, turning my head right to a forty five degree angle. He is a bit shy. He has flyers in his hand and is smoking a cigarette. *I handed out these flyers advertising a party and I put the wrong information and now I have to go around and hand out the new ones. A pain. But I'll get it done.*

He takes a long drag of smoke into his lungs and exhales. The woman and I look at him and then glance out to the sea. *By the way,* he says to me, pointing to a table messy with wine glasses and beer bottles, an industrial strength ashtray with half its metal lid missing, *I don't know you but wanted to mention*

that you handled yourself really well in the midst of that fiasco last night. My husband and I were watching the whole thing. Bravo. Admirable.

I have no idea what he is talking about because he has mistaken me for someone else, which is a pattern, which is something that happens often.

Thanks but it wasn't me. I wasn't even near here.

He is surprised. I breathe in smoke. The woman breathes in smoke. He breathes in smoke again. We are all thinking.

Say, I say, What was it all about anyway? Sounds intense.

Abortion.

Abortion?

Ya. There is a group of women here that think the new anti abortion laws are great. I could hardly believe it from anyone, but from women makes it worse in my mind. I was so angry.

He is political. The non-Southern Belle with the beautiful dress nevertheless says something but I can't make it out for a gust of wind, wind somehow like a breath exhaled by the sea skies. I am generally apolitical, though I have a few ideas here and there that lean left. I let them talk.

He listens to her and is upset about something and then voices his disagreement... They continue on though and are friendly but there is still some problem. Yet, they seem to find common ground on other things, more than not. Their voices fade out. I am thinking. I wonder what will happen if someone mistakes me for a person other than one that had a gift of oratory in debate, or attended an information technology training weekend, or someone who worked construction in the north of towns for a company that I, in reality, had never even heard name of. I wonder some more,

about other things similar that have also happened, like the man who identified me as the person who *Did not deserve one bit what Lisa and them did to you...no way, not you, who is a good guy and they are wicked evil and I am sorry you had to go through that..*

I don't know any Lisa or group like that.

But so far the reviews of the persons that are not me but look like me are good reviews.

I wonder what would happen if some authorities approach and say simply, *Can you come with us please*, and though it is a question on paper, is not a question in real life but a statement, and I have been mistaken for someone who did something, well, bad, untoward.

Two men come out and sit beside me on the right. One is of German descent. He told me this before. He chews on his cigar. *I am a fisherman, from California*, he says, as if simply continuing a days old conversation.

There are many rules where I come from, about fishing, I offer. If you get caught out of season they can impound your car, your boat, basically anything.

*That's right. Where I go also it is the same. Your Canada country population can fit into my California by the way. And, he puts his hand in front of him to help his point, and makes a gesture of some sort, *There are rules for a reason, and they should be obeyed. It's to protect the poor fishies.**

I laugh inwardly at hearing this big and otherwise tough guy, chewing on the thickest cigar I have ever seen, say, 'fishies,' instead of 'fish'.

Beside him I see the another man. His face and affect, clothing and something about his general aura remind me of an old friend that committed suicide. Joseph Campbell said that once you reach over thirty everyone you meet will remind you of someone else you already met. True enough. And then what about fifty? What happens then? Maybe unless you are an extrovert, you don't want to meet anyone else. This man looks like the suicide had he lived another decade or two. The man wears a collar shirt, a golf shirt or something close to one. Non-descript haircut, average height and weight if there are such things. I sense he is not an asshole though, but rather an okay guy. The suicide was also kind, especially as the world goes. Golf shirt is thoughtful but thinks about worldly things. He is talking to someone yet next

to his right about points, aero plan, miles, and he keeps glancing at his phone. This mediocrity consumes many people, perhaps the majority.

I breathe deeply, drawing the tropical air as if right to my stomach. Then I take a drag of nicotine and chemicals in smoke and bring them just as deeply in. I don't really want to talk to any of these people, one way or the other, but there is nowhere else to go to smoke. Its hard maintaining, to coin a phrase, 'lonership,' upon a ship. Someone apparently caused a fire on a balcony and there is no smoking any longer on such personal outdoor spaces. Everyone pays for the sins of one. Plus it's gotten late, and alcohol is a strange thing, - it loosens the mind otherwise inhibited and lubricates the lips. People say things they otherwise would not. I don't know that I want to see or hear or know what waits dormant in most peoples' minds and behind their lips.

The ship continues at eighteen to twenty knots, but it feels much faster than that in my guts and blood and bones. Maybe I am too sensitive, empathic towards the immediate and not so immediate environment. Luckily, a song sounds, and it's Fleetwood Mac. It's somehow soothing, a calm against the cacophony. Almost everywhere I go, they play Fleetwood Mac, because there is something universal about it all. I listen. I listen then to Stevie Nicks as she sings *Dreams*,

Oh, thunder only happens when it's raining

Players only love you when they're playing
Say, women, they will come and they will go
When the rain washes you clean, you'll know
Now here I go again, I see the crystal vision,
I keep my visions to myself

The wind picks up. A storm is beginning but they don't close the area. The man with the lauded hair excuses himself and goes inside. I am back with the bird-dress lady, who is kind and articulate, animated and eccentric and quite beautiful, statuesque. She speaks of many things seemingly at once. America. The Black experience. Diasporas. Education. Employment. Travel. Relationships. Even diet and nutrition. And hens, 'Hens,' which I sought clarification on, and was her designation for women that, as she put it, . . . *talk gossip, talk cheap talk, talk nothing but shit and lies about others, people that spread darkness and not light, not realizing that their darkness is going to come back and visit them double-fold in time. . .*

It begins raining hard.

That warm tropical rain.

The wind pushes it into the deck area.

We stand up together. She is tall by any metric. But I am taller. She asks me if she can hold my arm to go inside, and it is windy, for the breath of nature has become something much more pronounced.

I guide her inside at her request.

Where is the woman's washroom, she asks.

I don't know. I know the men's is here. But I have never gone to the woman's washroom. She walks with me to the stairs and I ask her if she will be okay to find one.

Yes.

I ascend the steps and she disappears down a hallway. I would normally offer to help her a bit more, to get there, but I have then begun worrying about many things, half formed fears, mistaken identities and the faulty perception of people, even of good people. I was thinking of storms, of politics and division, of life and no life, of health problems and health care, of alcohol, tobacco, and vessels that travel in the night through tropical storms strong.

At the top of the steps I was not out of breath, yet I paused and took a deep breath anyhow.

Then I began to make my way to my room, walking alone under one green electrical sign after another that illumined the way. I could feel the ship rocking back and forth more than usual, a ship perhaps five or seven stories high and housing more than three thousand people.

The night storm had gathered so much strength by then that I could hear the winds whistling even from the inner corridors of the boat.

They sounded like spirits calling out diatribes, rhetoric, pleas, strange joys plus metaphysical pains and warnings, all songs and long wild unabridged strange poems in the middle of a living dream. It all mixed together in my brain and spirit, and I thought of the sea and its vast expanse, of the Atlantic, the Caribbean, of how it rains, the sometimes pregnant sky birthing endlessly through time and cycle its own waters, and how the wind often takes these and places them everywhere, blows them with a breath, and they land sometimes in drips and drops like tears across and down windows, mostly never seen or noted, but having existed nevertheless.

There are spirits simply everywhere, and I think to myself then that many of the dead so-called are more alive than the living.

Sequitur

By Ayan Chakraborty

Conversations live within him.

Juiced upon tongues, picking his brain at the seventeenth hour of the day.

Such twilights are slow. Slower than the time he takes to recall the boy's joy on bright December afternoons under the wool of his

mom's shawl or the lonely play in a make-believe world where Digimons morph into trees.

Those times were ill with certainty.

Sure evenings, surer nights save for the phantom he once believed in ; those which he sees so often around. He talks. He talks more than he wishes to. Just to hear that one sound of prana that he could not find in Dubarray's album.

Voices drift, dig and dissemble.

Boots throb madly as the heart.

The drops hide behind LED lights before Delhi sheds a few more degrees.

Prison

By Amany Mohamed Atia

Do you hear that sound?

These whispering steps around
She slightly closes to the door

Do you feel it?

This warm blood on the floor
Crushing right and left of each side
To escape this prison, before she died
The end of this way, she can't find
Keep wondering where is the prison

Of that kind?

You will never reach
Since I am prisoned in my mind

Tabula Rasa

By Aneek Chatterjee

Unfinished stories peeping
through my mind this morning.

Quickly I brought my papers and pen.
Quickly I arranged my haggard table.

I sat down with boiled water and tea bags.
Plucked stories out of the peeping hole.

Quickly I released them on my paper
and closed my eyes in retrospection.

Having tea now, without sugar,
with a tabula rasa in front.

A portrait of an Artist

By Amany Mohamed Atia

Sort of unknown art
Strongly attached to some hearts
They never pretend or act
Look at the glorious fact
Of how unique they are
How imagination goes so far
To such individual vision
That grows and glows within
Look at that analytical mind
That can cleverly find
Beauty of everythings inside
Keeping flaws and sins aside
Here is the path of the free hearts

Breaking chains
Reaching stars

(This poem is inspired by the portrayal of Stephen in
James Joyce's A Portrait Of The Artist As A Young Man)

Finding Lost Parts

By Augusto Todoele

And who knows but that world is worlds, Egypt come
to Rome and Ireland among Lochloins and Finn Mac Cool,
Ramses Tut in this new improb human form divine, out-
Blake,

where mortals begin in mummies think to speak,
overthrow the kins, the kings, the things erred faint
change of world awake when it was killed,
we stun to learn, as Everyman Shem and Shaun,
the Egyptian follows, can these bodies live?

Tied to cannons, shot in air, a Sepoy blew
up and out the deep outpost Tucktomen,
dislocates thee mynde look three, Not just one so far.
Tincture tincture on the wall bring us
back to where we were and everything began
when ripcord falls to vortex turn and circles run
before their turn to nothing each the other's base
and there we have before us worlds, the one world on.

Egypt drove to France the fire gold this hand
to touch her long to man Gesheuntight Finn
erse solid west Egyptian ollave Irish erev rav.
Someewhere ephebe ones center day at night when nurses
trams are gone, and the prams go rolling on,
the alpha talk, bred into brains, with boasting ollave
cunning creep river bottoms for his parts, the dozen
or so arm or leg liver gizzard mind maa-mu
unity of effort calls out ohhh, the missuses media sleep.

But himself that scissioned fell full when he transmarrried
onenan, Atum, can there be doubt, Nun, we know,
the waters that not then were, then only were, then not
and nevermore could he stand up to offer self, a hill.

Hello a hollow rock, but not believe it will not last
the pram and tram empire to net, the light to unam sanctum
eat,
the mile long hundred letter omnino esse
de necessitate salutis buried last with Giza
trying to sleep, grasses whistering him he hears,

At night and shhh, you know it's shhh, a beat
of scatter those 12 to finger battle night in day
down shud a clatter, shatter, shudder, Sankey sunk
to the alf-gates for twelve pieces found.
One the hill gate, two in the glade, three on the mount gate,
four in the spring, five in nest, six rang from limbs,
seven swimming away on the pool, eight a beaver catching,
nine by the hen, ten, well ten was helioplit the center,
part hour of stillness ran a line up and down
to measure the culminated day and night,
eleven precognition, twelve the basket where he lay,
where he kept himself and that is as far, the pylon lapsed.

On the east bank emerged faith, burglars stole two parts
his pistis ollave out, found by hen about the periploi south,
and buried Babel there, not in Eire. A third sunk down
so it don't show the capsized husk pieces of Alp.
Pasted over it We don't like to speak husky immorts
presumed to wake, wakey wakey time to school
the land league, bog peat, the turf folk dudes,
Wakey wakey, you can't sleep. Wakey wakey,
humpty hills you're coming in but not,
the potlatch not your dispersed parts delivered
to twilight recovered lost day being night being day.

Poem 2:

By Hoda Amien

I write my poems with a knife that's blunt.
I carve my words with a blade of rust.
on voracious water do I write,
on a surface that engulfs my spite.
it takes and takes and don't adduce
a single letter of my curse.

I share my poems with autumn leaves,
They always listen in heaps and heaps.
twirling round in gustily wind,
at the rise of rhyme, they do bond
in a gambol of joyful weans.

I hang my poems on crooked branches,
I watch them burn and turn to ashes,
then mourn their loss— silently,
as my leaves float on the sea.

Fear

By Adam Barentine

There's a piece of the child I once was
still left inside me
and he's afraid of the dark.
Young and alone,
the unlit corners of my bedroom
brim with unnerving possibilities.
Open portals to the monsters I've created.
Ember eyes glowing in the abyss.

From through the closet doorframe,
I catch a message of hopeless fear.
Sound waves dancing with an unnatural gait.
*You may be able to run
and you may be able to hide,
but you can't do it forever.*
Waking with a gasp, a grown man sits up.
His eyes are wide, his back perspiring.
No less vulnerable than that child.

Where do our fears go
once we've conquered them?
Are they locked in a cell
with little possibility of escape
or are they generational?
An intrinsic part of our genetic code.
A gift our parents forced down our throat
just as their parents did for them.

I'm going to develop a vaccine for fear.

A catch-all cure injecting rational thought
directly into unused portions of the brain.
Then I won't need to overcome anything.
Growth will simply happen to me
without any changes in behavior.
Reveling in the majesty of unearned peace.
Eradicating all nightmares and psychological scars.

To Those Misfortunes

By Sandeep Kumar Mishra

I worshipped the Sun at riverbank,
still I have misfortune in
my golden prediction but it
soaked my wet aspirations.

Some people are tourists of youth
but some of us are paying guests,
a single regard is enough for
my soul to speak, hear, touch and see.

I'm still so rough around my edges
but my cold eyes know each other,
I don't tell stories to gain your pity,
My death is a process but now
I see lights over the sky
reflecting on bones of life.

The timely winds hurling the misfortune
I can read my body, dividing them
as if they were ages,
when I scratched the casket
I knew all water isn't life,
let my coffin be in glisters.

Some Youngster's Role of Life

By Shirsak Ghosh

Some Youngsters tend to be cynical

On their glaring goals;

None to suffice nor to explain.

Remained brokenheartedness in their astute chain.

With naive at their experience,

Far-fetched they showcase their untenable bravado.

Little do they deflate Life's struggles,

Uncongenial do their attitude slowly turns up.

Couldn't ferret out after life's deep quest.

They end up with the greatest perfunctory nod of life

What Does The Wind Know?

By Paul W. Hunt

It seems to have intentions,
I feel it when it blows,
It almost tries to whisper -
Then miss it when it goes.

It rushes right up at you,
Pushes right into your face,
Then runs away too quickly -
Is it in some kind of race?

It tries to blow your hat off,
And disarrange your hair.
There's something there I feel it,
Something it wants to share.

It comes from far-off places,
From where it doesn't say,
It's vexing it won't tell me -
Just turns and runs away.

I think it's on a mission,
And it's seen so many things,
I almost hear the voices,
That it carries on its wings.

To All Young Daughters of My Country

by Sandeep Kumar Mishra

How you carry scars of grown-ups
and consider them as cadaver of exigency
with the torture of that tender fidelity in
persistent struggles but keen for apotheosis?

For you, are relations actual manifestation
under grandiloquent bedspreads or
sad mystifications under the dearth of
overriding identities with many hidden negations?

Form is linked to desire and not to a 'hokum'
as you're growing but jotting is overhead,
An unborn tense soul recovers a radical
innocence that is narcissistic for you.

Juxtaposed to be beautiful and kind
You always think "Is beauty a sufficient end?"
To lose natural kindness and intimacy
you fear you will never find a true friend
as your innocent heart screams a wind out of
the frequent tide of your sea body

that the future years had come.

With each new test that society has come home for you,
you create a new sky above and the earth beneath
to show your worth as you are told to teach yourself
to march high-heeled across the garden of lust
without stretching your legs.

Having moved in illusions through years,
each bed where your cries arose like the cranes
that cry without pause and interval are
lost in these surging social babbles.

Feeling for a freedom through the constant pattern of bonds,
your life is a cargo and some of the stuff is heavy,
I always wish a lucky passage dear daughters as
every year extracts it's time-thread, a gospel-truth.

A Fictional Account

By Lynn White

This story is fiction.

Made up.

Made up like a face.

First the base,

the foundation,

then the shadows and highlights,

the blushers and sparklers,

the reds and the blues

to add interest and shape.

Then lines for emphasis.

Black,

thick night time black,

outlining the fiction.

So, there was a base

for this fantasy.

There was some foundation.

Even a made up story

has some links

with reality.

A spark from a dream,

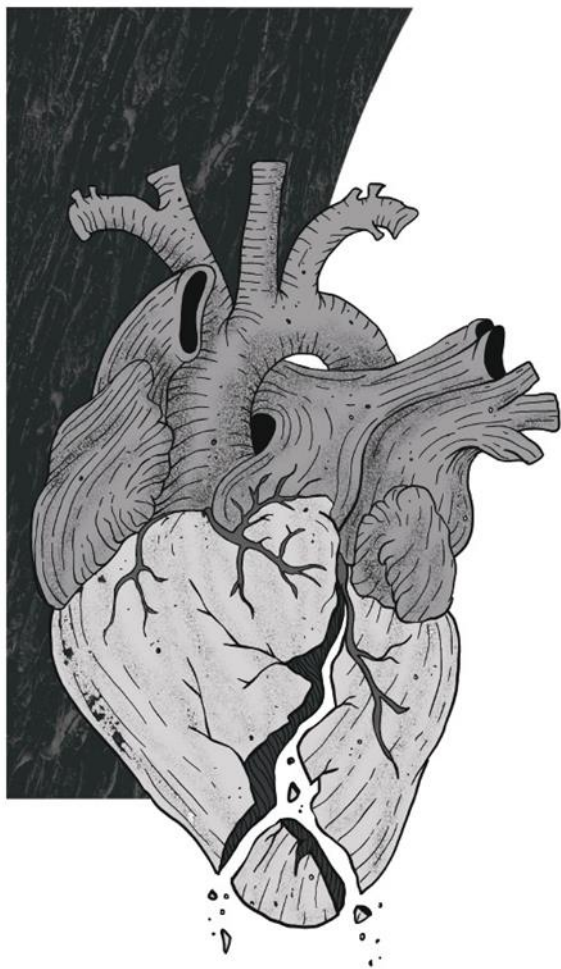
an inspiration

from experience,
mine, or yours,
or someone else's.
Something written,
something sung.
A word, a phrase, a line
from someone's life,
their fantastic real life,
or imaginings.
becoming real
in the telling,
when the make up
is removed
and the secrets
are revealed
between the lines.

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Foreign Words

By Shehab Adel



Foreign Words

By Fayrouz Ebeid

“I hope that for once I will stop sabotaging things to make sure they are real.”

You

made me real,

and I will hurt for you and because of you and be grateful for the pain.

You shouldn't be foreign to these words,

for you are the only real inhabitant of my heart.

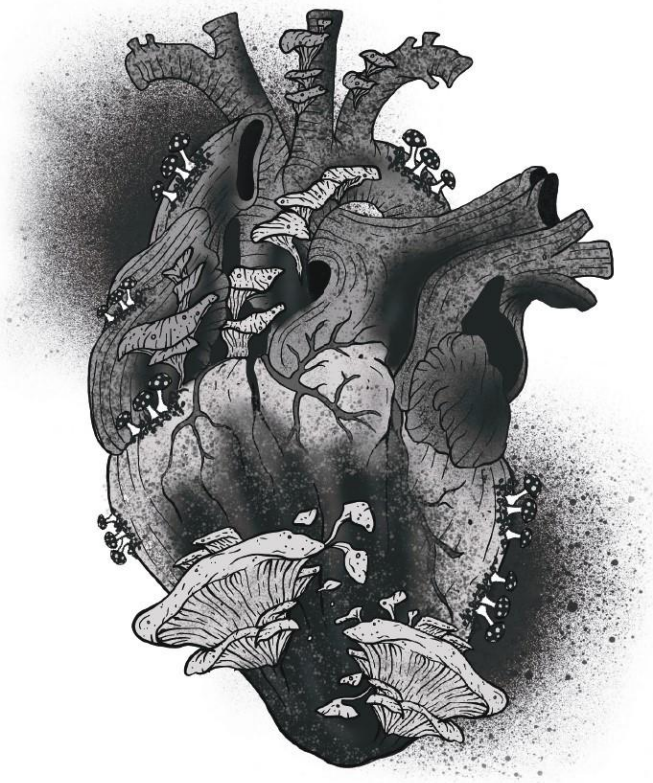
Forgive me if my heart cracks open

because one day,

I might need a release from the pain.

My Rotten Heart

By Shehab Adel



My Rotten Heart

By Fayrouz Ebeid

I was too young when my heart cracked open.

It has been rotting ever since.

I claim that I haven't troubled my heart,

but I confess now that I have.

Nothing seems to fill my lungs with air.

Nothing seems to stop the acid rain in my brain.

Nothing seems to empower my heart.

Am I meeting a new end or arriving to another
beginning?

I am choosing new battles to fight.

The question is: will my rotten heart endure the loss?

Forgotten Era

By Aneek Chatterjee

Nothing belongs to the past:
your smile, the season,
our footsteps, smell of the skin.

This narrow road has turned metaled of late.
But the old dust with sudden flowers in
adjoining bushes come back.

Happy oranges under the vibrant sun
revisit in winter. Torrential rains that went
deep inside before drenching us, pour again.

Tyranny and benevolence
still loiter around the throne and
on roads. Only we're myopic.

Sometimes, we fail to pick up.
Mad days obliterate myriad pictures,
we label events of the forgotten era.

My God in Your World

by Sandeep Kumar Mishra

The world is 'dacha' for cover consent
of inhuman things rather than
the sharp moments through which
human's being burns into God's relics.

When I say God, I mean higher
than those non-realistic subjects
out of which every symbol emerges
in a timely regime of every 'Avatar'.

When I say world, I mean lower
than the raw realities of actual
societies in which every cut-throat goes
in the name of colour and race.

How to find that God
and end this white pattern?
It is between the God and me,
As some dark threads are needed.

The power of a golden sun within,
Melting my hard heart,
Burning out the remnants of
my sin of subhuman testimony.

I promise no tomorrow,
There's no longing for the past,
But we still have promises
in every robin's song.

In the depth of despair,
there is a gulf of grief,
The hurting soul can't
remove its own heartbreak.

Dream of Eye

By Muqadas Latif

It was a very first time,
My heart and heads started
weaving a memory
Thousands of pictures are floating
in front of eyes
They saw a picture of very nearly
Millions of miles away things
I saw felt very near
Millions of dreams come in my eyes
It also feel very good
Feels so good as the things look real
My dream in eyes which made me smile
But when I open my eyes
All things are vanished from my eyes
I wanted to hold a dream for long
But all dreams are temporary
for some moment

Personification

By Prayerlife Nwosu

The sea applauds the wave
Over her mighty dance moves
The sky stares with amazement
As he winks with lightning sparks

Gently hums the breeze
As trees sing aloud
Grasses give the chorus
Nodding left to right

The sun laughs and cheers
With golden rays of light
Hot! Screams the soil
Calling for the rain

The cloud drums and roars
With heavy thunder claps
Down drives her tears
To hug and fill up holes

Up wakes the moon
With playing happy stars
Twinkling like diamonds
The moon smiles and stares.

I Watch the Moon

By Paul W. Hunt

I like to watch the moon,
And the moon watches me.
I walk along the road,
It drifts along to see.
It's peeping in and out,
From clouds so easily.

A mystery I think,
There's something to its face,
A funny kind of look,
A thing I cannot place.
Eyes or a nose maybe,
A face I try to trace.

I like the way it beams,
It's such a wondrous sight,
It shines on all below,
Casting a soothing light.
A watchdog up above,
The keeper of the night.

It follows me along,
A message it might send,
It makes me feel so warm,
It tries to be my friend.
I like to watch the moon,
This night must never end!

Honesty is the gate to thy heart

By Taeun Biswas Lee

Honesty is the
Gate to thy heart,
Open that gate,
So thy heart can
Be known.

May the flower
Of wisdom be
With thee in
Times of darkness
And sorrow,
Surely Her petals
Will bring thee
Strength in every
Color and hue of
Truth from Above.

All that I hold dear,
Is the rose of my garden,
A place I walk in the
Morning of my evening,
Held still by the light of
The moon.

Like a River

By Paul W. Hunt

The days are floating by slowly now,
Like leaves on a low river in late summer.

They know they are approaching the end of their journey
downstream,
Where they will sink down into the cold pond waters,
With the rest who have made the same journey.

Sometimes an afternoon rain will speed up the flow,
And the leaves will twirl again in the current,
And dance like they used to when it all began.

I remember the early days, when the waters ran fast and full,
We tumbled unharmed over rocks as we rushed through our
lives.

Unfrozen in spring, we couldn't get enough of life,
We couldn't do it fast enough.

We didn't care about danger or where the current took us,
It was the trip that made us happy.

And now the days float so slowly downstream,
Giving us time to remember the journey,
To reflect on the turns and spillways,
The fallen trees that tried to stop us,
To keep us from our passage.

We float more slowly now,
Unaware of what's downstream.
Only knowing where we are and where we've been.
It is the trip that makes us happy.

Her red blood oxidized

By Alaa Abd Al-Hadi Translated by Ahlam Othman



Her red blood oxidized
while pleading to the clock on the wall
to slow down a little so the jar is not full,
but the air left quickly
unheeding her pleading!
It was busy
with a window curtain!

The Flood

By Maqadas Latif

Land of plenty populated
Stills hearts crammed with sin
Wholesome deeds, Dishonourable thoughts
Disaster all around, high and low, near and far
Oblivious souls, distraction flourish
Such surrounding, righteousness remained
An unfolding promise destruction of all
Finally water in all sideway and by ways
Leaking through all alleys and subways
Many district and villages are wrap up
Overflowing canals, rivers
Overflowing streets and destroy houses
Millions of people are homeless
Many flocks and cars are swept away
Disaster are not only given by nature
It is also caused by us.

Cleaning Services (3)

By Antreka Tladi

Outside the window,
A rubber rake scrapes
The ground,
The spade chips and churn
The soil,
Cutting away grass
Clearing yesterday's
Footprints on the walkway,
Leave and twigs are gathered
And burnt
To create a new canvas
That awaits new memories
And new footsteps.

I can see that the dew left

By Taeun Biswas Lee

I can see that the dew left
On my eyelid were of a well
Dearest to the depths
Of my ocean heart,
So small,
As a pearl in an oyster,
Waiting to adorn the neck
Of a lady,
Who does not need
To be a goddess.

The Gladys

By Nancy Lubarsky,
(originally published by *US 1 Worksheets*)

Her toe dips in
as the water recedes.
One foot disappears,
then the other.
My mother edges
toward us, her knees
almost covered.

We call it *The Gladys*.
Late in the day, when the sun
started to fade, she finally
removed her wide-brimmed
hat to join us.

The *Gladys*—
never beyond her waist.
Her fingertips skinned the surface,
then slipped under to cup the water,
to soak her arms, chest, face.
Sometimes we splashed around her,
until she shrieked for us to stop.

We never glimpsed the powerful
swimmer my father said she once was.
We only remember a wisp of a woman
who never left the shallow,
or spread her arms to keep afloat.

From Dan Dare To The Daleks

By Lynn White

From Dan Dare to the Daleks
I would childishly imagine
what it would be like
to float in space
above it all
and look down on our blue planet.

From Dan Dare to the Daleks
I imagined what they would be like,
the beings, the creatures I would meet
on my journey.

Now I can no longer imagine it,
no longer think of how
I would find them
Now I wonder what they would find here
on the remnants of our blue planet.

Now I wonder if it will be
as they imagined

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Light, light years

By Rana Elbowety

The cigarette slowly burned to death
Her void filled with liquid smoke,
Opaque, eternal for mere seconds.
Her life overlapped with man's,
Albeit for only minutes.
A lifetime, some said, but others
knew the real story, the struggle,
The dilemma of being, of life,
Of worlds that are light

years

apart.

Man cannot truly understand how vast
the distance is, yet eventually,
he heedlessly breathes in

Stranger

By Binod Dawadi



Time to go

By Rana Elbowety

I put the round, white helmet
on a table beside the door.
It will be time to go soon.
I take a breath, remind myself
that my feet will merely set
out for an hour, no more.
I put on my astronaut suit,
buckle up all, take a breath.
Glancing at the door, I
zip up my suit, put on
the round, white helmet.
“It’s time to go,” he says.
I adjust the tank on my back
and check my oxygen level,
then step into the street.

Poem 3:

By Hoda Amien

So long, friends, I thought we'd never meet.

The year I lost my north star,
was when I found my creed.

I made a home out of storms,
and poems out of scars,
I chanted all forbidden tones,
then built cathedrals
to spread them around.

I claimed a crown
that was not mine.

I crushed my heart,
worshipped my mind,
in constant search for Truth.

with blinded eyes, and tied hands,

I roamed this land by chance,
guided by uncertainty.

But now that my sky is starlit,
and my nights are all blue,
I abandoned my flock,
to stray away with you.
only to find
that I'm a misfit,
even in your estranged troops.

The Stars Cross this Endless Universe

By Myrtle Thomas

winter brings the coldest death to bury
the saddest color of purest white
then and now I touch your face with-
my memory looking past those windows
knowing the faint footprints are disappearing
-----in this December day.

each hour is a white marble statue
stiffened in the frigid sunless - moonless day
here and there I loved you in the fallen
moment of time.

-----my heart melts in your death
and death dies over and over again-----
the grave has been left open and crying
feeling your dead eyes staring off into space

I loved you once and only once-----
with a fever like the desert sun so very close
-----now the fresh cold snow burns harshly
cutting my flesh at the memory of your touch
I've tried to turn away but it's impossible

hardly enough strength to rise from this deep-
grave that I've tended like a diamond shimmering
O ' mourning rises within me-----
and no one sees this burning cold star as it falls
-----or even feels it like I have
starless skies and moonless memories-----
linger in secret music dancing in the darkness

darling you have buried me within your heart-
and eternity calls through the empty universe
----- where life was once and only once.

If only

By Taeun Biswas Lee

If only

Dying poets

Could have

Seen the

Brilliance of

A thousand

Footsteps held

Still in thine

Eyes.

Night reveries

By Rana Elbowety

On the steps of broken stairs
April sat in dwindling light
Marble cold and hard below
Wrapped in silver veils, a row

Dusk grew strong with bitter chills
As the lonely people slept
Droplets onward seeped through cracks
Into walls and on their backs

Words still dangled on blue strings
Burdened with the weight of time
Still the flight of broken stairs
Hid from sight all lonesome lairs

Distant shouts of angered souls
Dismal, shrouded all in black
Drowned in silence, out of sight
Slipped through reveries at night

Barter, bargain, broken, blind
April wondered how to find
Words uncaptured that can be
Blatant, there for all to see

Meanings are to be fulfilled
Only with embraces true
Neither sound nor word can still
Minds that grow on windowsills

April Shower

By Jeff Lincoln

Adrift and aloft in a plane
Counting time in miles not minutes
Life postulates what will kill us first
The agony the ecstasy or monotony

It's not heroic to fight all the time
Give enough people hell and you'll damn yourself
Your battle lines were drawn into caricature
Only a statue has one pose

Someday we'll find tumors are made from nostalgia
Melancholy knocks, then rings, then calls again
I'm looking back on the path I took;
And squint as I might
Fail to see the pattern

Tonight I will listen for the ocean's beckoning
I will walk until my feet feel sand
Breathe deeply
waiting for the moon to kiss the horizon
I will ache and I will hope
Wondering if the Dead can dream

SURVIVING “ADAGIO FOR STRINGS”

By Bill Cushing

First
and only rule:

Never listen in the dark or
while vulnerable
for

every heartbreak,
every 3 a.m. drunken phone call,
every failed relationship
 that’s been boxed up,
 put on a shelf

will bore its way
out
of your memory
and pierce
your tear ducts

especially
when
enduring
that final,
single, seemingly never-ending and eternal

note

Contributors

Abubakar Terkimbi Saidu hails from Konshisha Local Government area of Benue State. He is a Poet, Playwright, and a short story writer. Most of his poems have appeared in many anthologies locally and internationally. His poem, “Thomases,” that has appeared in “Plague 2020,” an international anthology of poems is a very good example.

Adam Barentine is a Portland based poet living his best life in the Pacific Northwest. He is a firm believer that one should read a hundred poems for every one they write and is happy to provide recommendations upon request.

AE Reiff wrote *The JFK Order (Grand Canal Flyway, 2023)* and *Memoir of Angels (Newfoundland Books, 2022)*.

Alexander Limarev, freelance artist, mail art artist, poet, visual poet and curator from Russia/Siberia. Participated in more than 1000 international projects and exhibitions. His artworks are part of private and museum collections of 72 countries. His artworks as well as poetry have been featured in various online publications including *BUKOWSKI ERASURE POETRY ANTHOLOGY (Silver Birch Press)*, *BRILLER MAGAZINE*, *ICONIC LIT*, *CARAVEL LITERARY ARTS JOURNAL*, *MAINTENANT*, *THE GAMBLER MAG*, *TUCK MAGAZINE*, *EKPHRASTIC REVIEW*, *MUSH/MUM MAG*, *KILLER WHALE JOURNAL*, *ANGRY OLD MAN MAGAZINE etc.*

Alexander Sharov matriculated from Dnepr National University (Ukraine) with degrees in English and Psychology. He translates contemporary fiction from Russian and Ukrainian into English.

Allison Grayhurst is a member of the League of Canadian Poets. Five times nominated for “Best of the Net,” she has over 1375 poems published in over 525 international journals. She has 25 published books of poetry and 6 chapbooks. She lives in Toronto with her family. She also sculpts, working with clay.

Amany Mohamed Atia (a fourth year student in the Faculty of Education – English Department).

Aneek Chatterjee is from Kolkata, India. He has published more than five hundred poems in reputed literary magazines and poetry anthologies across the globe. He was a Fulbright Visiting faculty at the University of Virginia, USA and a recipient of the ICCR Chair (Govt. of India) to teach abroad.

Antreka Tladi was born in Jane Furse, Limpopo, RSA. He grew up in Phokwane, Brooklyn where he received his Primary and secondary education and currently lives. His poems have appeared in local and international journals and anthologies. He was honoured with an African Honoree Authors Award 2022.

Augusto Todoele is a recluse.

Ayan Chakraborty. He is currently a PhD Research Scholar and a Senior Research Fellow at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He is working on “Gandhi’s Negative Hermeneutics: Self, Language and Protest” for doctoral research. He has published many critical academic papers and book chapters in literature and cultural studies across various national and international journals/edited books. He has also published a book of his collected poems in July, 2022. The books is entitled “One Un-Poetry and other poems” and is available on Amazon.

Ayatullah Rabie is an MA candidate at the Faculty of Arts, English Literature, Damanhour University, Egypt. She writes about her inner and outer world and how she sees, feels, and notes from the simplest to the most complex things in life. All of this inspires her to express her human and emotional experiences.

Bill Cushing earned his MFA from Goddard College. He has four volumes of poetry: *A Former Life* (Kops-Fetherling International Book Award); *Music Speaks* (San Gabriel Valley Poetry Festival winner; New York City Book Award); “. . .*this just in*. . .”, and most recently *Just a Little Cage of Bone*.

Binod Dawadi, the author of *The Power of Words*, holds a master's degree in English. He has worked on numerous anthologies and been published in various magazines. His vision is to change society through knowledge, so he wants to provide enlightenment to people through his writing skills.

Brian Michael Barbeito is a Canadian poet, writer, and photographer. Recent work appears at *The Notre Dame Review*.

C. J. Anderson-Wu is a Taiwanese writer. In 2017 she published *Impossible to Swallow—A Collection of Short Stories About The White Terror in Taiwan* and in 2021 *The Surveillance—Tales of White Terror in Taiwan*. Based on true characters and real incidents, her works look into the political oppression in Taiwanese society during the period of Martial Law (1949-1987), and the traumas resulting from the state's brutal violation of human rights. Currently she is working on her third book *Endangered Youth—To Hong Kong*. C. J. Anderson-Wu's stories and poems can be found in the *Global Anthologies of Short Stories(US)*, *Eastlit(Southeast Asia)*, *Lunaris Review(Nigeria)*, *Strands Lit Magazine(India)*, *Short Story Avenue(US)*, *Olney Magazine(US)*, *So Fi Zine(Australia)*, *An Capall Dorcha/The Dark House(Ireland)*, *Short Story Town(US)*, *Hennepin Review(US)*, *MockingOwl Roost(US)*, *Kitaab(Singapore & India)*, *LEO Literary Journal(US)*, *Bazinega(India)*, *Main Squeeze Literary Journal(US)*, *Confetti Westchester Writers Workshop Magazine(US)*, *Story Sanctum(US)* and *e-ratio(US)* among other literature journals.

Carl Scharwath, has appeared globally with 175+ journals. Carl has published three poetry books and his latest book “Playground of Destiny,” features poetry, short stories and photography (Impspired Press) He has also published four poetry books. He was nominated for two The Best of the Net Awards (2021-22)

Chaymae Achami is a Doctoral Research student at the Faculty of Languages, Arts, and Human Sciences at the University of Ibn Zohr in Agadir-Morocco. Her academic work aims at rethinking the memory of Moroccan women that has been created and is being created through Moroccan Tv. In her artistic journey, her literary and poetry work expresses a sense of longing for human connection and self-destruction. With a hint of modernism and existentialism, her words are a manifestation of the accumulation of beauty, love, and violence of human experience.

CL Bledsoe Raised on a rice and catfish farm in eastern Arkansas, CL Bledsoe is the author of more than thirty books, including the poetry collections Riceland, The Bottle Episode, and his newest, Having a Baby to Save a Marriage, as well as his latest novels Goodbye, Mr. Lonely and The Saviors. Bledsoe lives in northern Virginia with his daughter.
creative.

Daz Pearce is a performance poet, lyricist and 'long-time writer of stuff that rhymes' from Preston, England. His previous poetry works include Provoked and Encyclopedia Platonica, as well as several musical projects including his current work under the name of Fangless.

Dmitriy Galkovskiy is a Russian philosopher and man of letters. He matriculated from Moscow State University with a degree in Classical Philosophy.

Doug Moss is a San Antonio native and graduate of the University of Texas in Austin with a degree in business administration. He joined the Fort Worth Police Department and moved to the Dallas/Ft. Worth Metroplex, serving the department for 15 years. He's retired now and wanting to share the stories of the past.

Dr. Ahlam Othman is an associate professor of English Language & Literature at the Faculty of Arts & Humanities, British University in Egypt. She has a Ph.D. in English Literature from Al-Azhar University and two MA degrees: one in English Literature from Al-Azhar University and the other in TEFL from the AUC. In addition, Dr. Othman has registered for another Ph.D. in Comparative Poetics. Dr. Othman's research interests are English Literature, Comparative Literature, Literary Translation, and Interdisciplinary Studies. She has translated four volumes of poetry and a book on Comparative Poetics into English. In addition, she edited and participated in the translation of several books into Arabic. She is a board member of the Egyptian Society of Comparative Literature, editor of *Muqaranat*, an annual journal and a reviewer for the National Center for Translation.

Fayrouz Ebeid, a graduate of the British University in Egypt, Faculty of Arts & Humanities, Department of English Language and Literature -who majored in literature criticism-, currently a postgraduate student at the BUE MA Programme Literary & Cultural Studies as well as a Teaching Assistant at the BUE in the Faculty of Communication and Mass Media.

Hayley Charles was born and raised in Western Kansas and currently resides in Colorado. She studied Journalism at Fort Hays State University and has been published in *Westword* and the *Hays Daily News*.

Helsea Ikwanga, is a Malawian writer. Helsea Ikwanga's works has appeared and is forthcoming in New York's Evergreen Review. Longlisted three times (2023, 2021, 2019) for Commonwealth Short Story Prize, he is an alumnus of Commonwealth Creative Writing Workshop Lusaka 2018, mentored by Commonwealth Writers' Book Prize awardee Ellen Banda- Aaku(Zambia) and Booker Prize winner Damon Galgut(South Africa). A resident of Blantyre City, Helsea is currently working on his debut novel titled The theory of a naked body.

Henry Vinicio Valerio Madriz, born in Atenas, Costa Rica, 1969, is a teacher who studied English Teaching, Literature, and Linguistics. He has published online and in print.

Hoda Amien, a fresh AAST graduate with a bachelor's degree in Language and Communication, currently a GTA at the college of Language and Communication in Alexandria, Egypt.

Iwuagwu Ikechukwu is an African poet, Essayist, Screenwriter and Dramatist. A native of umunkwo in Imo state, Nigeria. His reviews and short stories have appeared in several literary magazines across the world both online and in print. He was a recipient of an honourable mention in the IHRAF Creators of Justice award in New York - 2020 edition, and was also shortlisted for the 2022 Alpine Fellowship Visual Arts Prize in London, UK as well as the ANTOA essay prize in Africa. He can be added on Facebook via: Ikechukwu Iwuagwu.

J.M. Summers was born and still lives in South Wales. Previous publication credits include Another Country from Gomer Press, Borderlines, New Feathers, Sonic Boom, and the Amethyst Review. The former editor of a number of small press magazines, he has published one book, Niamh, a collection of prose and poetry.

Jeff Lincoln lives in a New Jersey town so small it has no traffic lights, and only one craft brewery. His writing has appeared in High Shelf Press, Local Gems, and Country Standard Time. In the 90s, he won a contest for the funniest answering machine message in Tampa Bay.

Linda M. Crate's works have been published in numerous magazines and anthologies. She is the author of twelve poetry chapbooks, the latest of which is: *searching stained glass windows for an answer* (Alien Buddha Publishing, December 2022). She has also authored four micro-collections, two novellas, a photography collection, and four full length poetry collections.

Lynn White lives in north Wales. Her work is influenced by issues of social justice and events, places and people she has known or imagined. She is especially interested in exploring the boundaries of dream, fantasy and reality.

Maqadas Latif is a poet

Michael Igoe, city boy, neurodiverse, Chicago now Boston. Numerous works appear in journals and anthologies (available at amazon.com, lulu.com, barnesandnoble.com). National Library of Poetry Editor's Choice Award 1997. Twitter: MichaelIgoe5 poetry-in-motion.org.

Michael Lee Johnson lived ten years in Canada during the Vietnam era. Today he is a poet in the greater Chicagoland area, IL. He has 275 YouTube poetry videos. Michael Lee Johnson is an internationally published poet in 44 countries, has several published poetry books, has been nominated for 6 Pushcart Prize awards, and 6 Best of the Net nominations. He is editor-in-chief of 3 poetry anthologies, all available on Amazon, and has several poetry books and chapbooks. He has over 453 published poems. Michael is the administrator of 6 Facebook Poetry groups. Member Illinois State Poetry Society: <http://www.illinoispoets.org/>.

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Myrtle Thomas is a contemporary poetry writer who writes of ranging topics from her observation of life and the activities around her and across the world. She has a collection of poetic musings on the man-made worlds, the intertwinings that blur their boundaries and the emotions that push and pull their horizons into perspective. She has four published poetry books and has been featured in the Spring edition of "Writers and Readers Magazine" Volume 4 2022. Myrtle has been published in "Otherwise Engaged Literary Journal" Volumes 8, 9 and 10. She was published in a summer e-book by Silent Spark Press "Beautiful Poetry" 2022, she has been read and also read poetry on four Pod Casts. Myrtle lives in the USA and is retired from a large manufacturing company, which gives her time to write her poetry. She tries to find a place in the reader's mind that they too can associate with in her poetic musings. She was also acknowledged in another poet's published poetry book "grief and her three sisters" by Jerry Lovelady.

Nancy Lubarsky writes from Cranford, New Jersey. An educator for 35 years and a retired superintendent, she's been published in various journals including Exit 13, Lips, Tiferet, Paterson Literary Review and Stillwater Review. She's authored two books: Tattoos (Finishing Line Press) and The Only Proof (Kelsey Press). She has been nominated three times for Pushcart Prizes.

Paul W. Hunt Published Poet retired from a 43 year career in Financial Services/Information Technology. "Editor's Choice Award" from The Poetry Guild in 1998 for "Last December Dance." Published in *Cherish* and *Nevermore*, by The Ravens Quoth Press. Currently living in South Florida. Hobbies: Golf, Reading and Writing Poetry.

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Phyllis Adams is new writer, retired with time on my hands now to finish some poems I started years ago, also bits and pieces of essays, short stories, etc.

Prayerlife Nwosu Her poems have been published in Voices of Africa Anthology, News corner media etc. She participated in the African Human Right short story contest; and one of the Libretto Magazine best 2023 nominations. Currently she's the state Information Secretary of the Society of young Nigerian writers (SYNW) Imo state chapter.

Rana Elbowety is a translator and aspiring creative writer based in Cairo, Egypt. After completing her PhD in English literature, she has dedicated herself to the pursuit of all things creative.

Rhiannon Bird is an Australian author who writes science fiction and fantasy. She spends her days writing and pursuing her PhD. When she isn't doing these things she can be found going on hikes, playing board games and talking in the middle of movies.

Rhys Hughes was born in Wales but has lived in many countries. He currently lives in India. He has been writing short stories and poetry for many years and has always wanted to write plays too, but only began doing so fairly recently. He says, "Ionesco and Pinter and Beckett are the playwrights I most admire. There is a depth to their absurdity that affects me strongly." Several of his short plays have been published but he is still waiting for them to be performed.

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Sandeep Kumar Mishra is the poetry editor at Indian Poetry Review. He has received "Maharashi Vedvyas Award-2022", "Readers Favorite Award-21", "Indian Achievers Award-21", "IPR Poetry Award-2020" and "Literary Titan Book Award-2020". He was shortlisted for "2023 Commonwealth Story Prize", "2021 International Book Awards", "52nd New Millennium Award-2021", "Asian Anthology-2021" and "Joy B Poetry Prize 2021" and "Opelle Poetry Prize 2021" and "MPT Story Award-2022" and "Newcastle Story Award-2022" and "Anasi Story Award-2022" and "Independent Press Award-2022" and "IAN Book Award 2022".

Santwana Chatterjee graduated from Lady Brabourne College (CU) with honours in Philosophy. and then finished masters degree from The University of Calcutta with Mental and Moral Philosophy Worked at The Institute of Chartered Accountants from August 1978 - February 2008 and retired As an Assistant Secretary Before and after superannuation I started writing prose and poetry in both English and Bangla and many of my creations were published in literary pages(The Statesman, telekids.Times of India, Famina, and CBT (children's book trust of India).I have Quite a few published books in both languages

Shanta Lee Gander is an award winning artist and author. She works in different mediums as a photographer, writer across genres and is a public intellectual whose work has been widely featured. To learn more about her work, visit: Shantaleegander.com.

Shirsak Ghosh is a State Aided College Teacher at Serampore Girls' College, West Bengal, India. He is a faculty member of this college for a few years. Besides Teaching, which is his profession, he composes some creative poems. He has composed some Poems published in following journals like IJELH, Literary Herald, Literary Cognizance and GNOSIS. Some of his poems were published in different edited books like Aulos: An Anthology of English Poetry, Insulatus: An Anthology of Modern English Poetry, Otherwise Engaged: A Literature and Arts Journal, Contemporary Visions: An Anthology of Poems, Love Letters in Poetic Verse and COVID-19: Impressions on Society. He had recently published his poem in Indian Periodical.

Sohini Shabnam from Chinsurah, Hooghly, West Bengal India. I completed my graduation from Hooghly Mohsin College. Currently I'm pursuing masters in English literature. My hobbies are- writing, drawing, calligraphy, photography, gardening etc.. I started writing in 2020 and published my first Bengali poem collection 'Hoyto tomari jonno' in 2021 and second book 'Simple', an English poem collection in 2022.

Stanka Bajlozova-Barlamova is born 06.02.1993 in Gevgelija, Republic of North Macedonia. She graduated in Philological faculty "Blaze Koneski" in Skopje on department of Macedonian literature and South Slavic literatures. In 2020 she published her book "Silueti" (short stories). Today she works in The house of culture "25 May" in Valandovo.

Taeun Biswas Lee and I am a South Korean, United States Citizen raised in Kathmandu, Nepal by Protestant missionaries. My first love is acting, however poetry has given me a lake in the forest. I hope you can find my peace there.

Urmi the author is a 43 year old Bengali from Kolkata. Presently she is a stay-at-home mom to her two kids after she left her 18 year old job with a leading IT company. She has done an Engineering degree in Electronics and Communication though literature, primarily in English

W Roger Carlisle is a 75-year-old, semi-retired physician. He currently volunteers and works in a free medical clinic for patients living in poverty. He is on a journey of returning home to better understand himself through poetry. He hopes he is becoming more humble in the process.