afterword



issue one – 2026





Literature has always been a conversation.

Every poem, every story, every fragment begins with a voice reaching beyond itself, hoping to be met by another. Afterword exists to make space for those conversations: to celebrate emerging writers, encourage creative risk, and preserve the remarkable breadth of voices within our community.

This inaugural issue brings together work that resists easy categorisation. Across these pages are moments of intimacy and uncertainty, humour and grief, memory and imagination. Some pieces ask difficult questions; others simply invite us to pause.

Together, they remind us that literature is less concerned with certainty than with attention – with looking closely, feeling deeply, and allowing language to shape new ways of seeing.

To everyone who entrusted us with their work, thank you. It has been a privilege to read, edit, and present these pieces with the care they deserve.

Whether you read from beginning to end or open these pages at random, we hope you find something that lingers long after the final page.

Welcome to the first issue of Afterword.

Sincerely,

[aw]

featuring

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by Liana Wilson

I. beginnings / arrival

we have to start
somewhere

Take What You Can Get



By Valerie Yu

"Read me something," I demand. We are sprawled on her bed, held safe in the walls of her apartment; I gesture to the books strewn like leaf litter across the floor in front of her wardrobe. "Come on, Anna. Read me something, why don't you?"

"Fetch me a smoke," she retaliates. Her green eyes meet mine—smooth, twinkling marbles that knock me off the bed—so I obey, rummaging through her room for a pack. It is a Sunday, so we have taken to living like Parisians at the turn of the century; lovers with nothing better to do than catnap in the sun, char their lungs with tobacco, and release pheromones of lust.

There are no cigarettes, but I find a lighter.

"Come back to bed, then," says Anna, pushing herself into a patch of sunlight. She lifts a hand, dexterously catching what I throw her. "And pick up the blue-covered book on your way."

"I didn't ask for sonnets," I say. My hands tighten around the worn material as I scan the faded lettering; I have never been particularly apt at decoding Shakespeare.

"And I asked for a smoke, but we take what we are given, do we not?" An orange flame leaps, then hides again; she tucks the lighter in her pocket when I hand her the book.

With practised movements, she opens to a dog-eared page. A traitorous thought leaps—maybe I am not the only girl she has kissed who has asked to be read to—but it is gone by the time she says, "I like this one."

She reads, and her voice is a spool of honey winding through the words, which sing despite my lack of understanding. I tell her as much, expecting a smile and the rewarding glow of her smooth, marble eyes, but her lips purse instead.

"You didn't understand it," Anna accuses.

I blush. “I don’t know as much about Shakespeare as you do.”

“Then why did you ask me to read to you?”

“Because I like the way the words sound when they come out of your mouth.” I had seen her perform once at a poetry slam, heard the measured cadence she had hammered out, and decided I would sync my heartbeat to iambic pentameter if it meant appreciating her brilliance. “I love the way you speak.”

“Is that all poetry is to you, then?” Anna asks. “Style, and not substance?”

What would a turn-of-the-century Parisian say? How would she, amateur that she is, spin poetry to feed the poet? It would be easy to apologise; to ask her to explain why my breath reeks, or why my eyes do not shine like the sun, but I cannot break the spell now.

“It’s music,” I decide.

“Music,” Anna repeats.

“She reads, and her voice is a spool of honey winding through the words, which sing despite my lack of understanding.”

“Yes. I don’t understand it, but I was told to take what I was given and make the most of it.”

She smiles. Her eyes do not push me away, and I know I have won the game of marbles, for once.

“You’re learning,” she says.

Anna’s lips taste sweet against mine.



Valerie Yu is a Meanjin-based writer and poet with a passion for sharing stories. She has been published in Kill Your Darlings (2025) and Vellichor Literary (2026). She has participated as a Salon reader for Jacaranda Journal (2026).

She is currently working on her first poetry anthology, “Mercurial Darling.” When Valerie isn’t writing, she can be found enjoying an iced chocolate and a good book.



Niamh Kelly

"I am a young Irish-Australian Creative Writing student with a passion for poetry – especially poetry that explores deep and difficult emotions – as well as using profound imagery to convey them. I draw inspiration from my heritage, my favourite music, and my dreams, which are often vivid and complex."

It's Time to Go

What can I say?
The red tea stagnant in my cup,
A reflection of the naked branches above,
Like veins on glass,
Makes my stomach turn.

Help me say the right thing.
The figs in the basket by the door -
So purple,
So purple next to the snow.

I'll only ruin it.
Sun-dappled foxgloves,
Velveteen primrose,
Pepper-spotted poppies.

And flame-licked leaves,
That dried in the sun today.

- Niamh

Rou

By Mikayla Nobleza

Death knew this routine all too well. Standing outside of Room 204, they glanced through the window. A woman with chestnut hair was peacefully asleep on the bed with IVs in her wrist. Death remained still as the nurses walked by, unaware of the shrouded figure with its stark and inky cloak pooling, the cobra-like material highlighting the silver sharp scythe strapped to their towering body. The nurses said nothing, it wasn't their time. Death could have worn something else - maybe a judge cap or white hair, even transfigure into a black wolf. But no, the simple attire would do. After all, it was a clear-cut job, there was no need for theatrics.

With a steady stride, Death phased through the door. The pungent scent of latex gloves and swabbing alcohol that wafted through the maternity ward was still permeating the room.

Death stepped towards the woman in front, their gaunt finger stretched out, offering an olive branch to seal the deal. It was never an easy job, but everyone had their time; everyone's time eventually ran out, and hers was near. Death could feel it through the pulsating energy engulfing the room, a soul practically screaming, "I'm almost ready!" But something wasn't right. She wasn't glowing. With a tilt of their hood, Death glared at the woman, trying to make sense of it all. A human life was buzzing to be collected, so why was her soul not bleeding from her shell?

That's when Death noticed it. Craning their head to the right, Death laid eyes on the pastel blue cot, a warm golden glow flickering from inside. It couldn't be. With the weight of their scythe dragging them down, Death

tine

hesitantly stepped towards the baby boy. His eyes were shut, and his chestnut-coloured hair reflected the woman's on the bed. His glowing chest was barely rising. Death took a step back, almost stumbling against its coat. Staring at the gentle face, Death saw a boy whose only memories were of the blaring lights when he entered the world no less than five hours ago. There was still hope though, he was still flickering. Death's bony hands stayed clenched at its side, refusing to reach out. The boy started burning brighter. Death dug its skeletal fingers in its palm. The boy burned even brighter; Death looked down on the floor. The buzzing and light eventually grew to a constant, and Death knew the battle was lost.

But Death refused to look at him. Maybe by some miracle, if they didn't see it happen, if their hand didn't touch him, some guardian angel would reach down and breathe life back into his lungs. Death could ignore this just once, surely the world wouldn't collapse over one less soul being reaped.

They could call it an early night; the sinking feeling inside would eventually subside. But as Death started to shuffle back, they couldn't resist looking up at the sound of a soft coo. The boy stared at them; his glowing hand now free from his swaddle, desperately stretching out to seek comfort from the menacing figure. And Death knew what they had to do.

They knew this routine all too well.

But that didn't stop a tar-like tear from rolling down its face, as its bony finger reached out to meet the delicate hand.

Mikayla Nobleza

Mikayla is a nineteen year-old student who is currently interested in writing. Another passion of hers is film and television, so she has also been writing screenplays.



Lost Time

By Ella Nulley



It's your smile.
That's what got me first.
That infectious, contagious smile that you can see from a mile away.
Sat in front of me complacently, with the world around you being nothing more than a playground for you to challenge and juggle with.

You looked up and gave me one crack of a grin, and I knew it was you who I wanted to spend the last of my time here with.
Here, has always been the hometown that stripped my identity until there was nothing let of me but skin and bone.
Suffocated, tortured, and tested me until my own lens of myself became blurry.
The lines between living and surviving had merged.
Until I met you.
Suddenly, this obnoxious, charismatic stranger in front of me flooded my world here, with nothing but warmth.
It was selfish of me really, wanting something knowing that the expiry date was only a few months away.
I was leaving, moving on and away from this town, this reality.
But I couldn't help it, you were a force that pulled at the deepest parts of my heart, and I knew I had to know you.
I craved your story, every puzzle piece that connected that grin to the darkest parts of you.
That first hour that I knew you, I started to feel a light in me that died a long time ago.
I should've turned my back, smiled at the occasion of meeting a character that was written by the same pen as I.
Not only the country music, mirroring humour, and athletic passions we shared. But also, the stubbornness, testing of morals, and the fears of disloyalty.
We were two, mirroring each other, cut from the same cloth you could say.
Both in what we share, and what parts we try to hide.
It was beautifully terrifying.
I should have removed my hand from the drawing and walked away.
But I just couldn't.
That infectious smile, that laugh, those bronze eyes filled with love.
I needed that in my life.
I should've saved you, saved you from the impending heartbreak and the tight rope of losing time we were going to find ourselves on, but I like to think you liked the danger just as much as I did.
And then came the night only 1 month before I had to go.
That night you looked at me with soft eyes, staring straight through my barriers, breaking down my barricades.
What we felt between us was sensitively raw, and unbreakably real.
My inability to hide any of my demons from you, because truly I had no reason to hide. When you whispered those three words, eight letters.
I felt it.
That feeling that humans search for throughout their entire lives.
The racing heart, yet so full, the warmth, and the smile that you can't help but spread across your face.
I was in love.
And for the first time in my life, I wasn't scared of that word, because that's what it was, that's what flooded through every corner of me.
Washed my world and my priorities upside down.
In that moment I blocked out the whispering in my head that we didn't have long left, avoided the seeping realisation that our love was going to dissipate.
All I thought was that I wanted you as my future, my new beginning, my soul tie.
Somewhere between before you, and after, what I wanted for myself had changed.
I yearned for you to be what saved me from that town.
Yearned for you to be the missing puzzle piece, rather than moving away being it.
I wanted you as my forever.
But it wasn't that simple, was it.



“Mother, the Afternoon Before I Leave”
by CC Chan

Nappy-headed Judas

by Claire Matsika

Traitor!
Trading silver coins,
For silver eyes and freckles.
Freckles that sent silver bullets,
Through Ambuya's chest.
Freckles that put silver chains,
on Sekuru's wrists.

At night, when I dream, I'm Pygmalion.
Scrubbing away my cursed exterior, revealing alabaster flesh.
Painting my thin lips a delicate pink,
Carving my nose petite and upturned.
Frizzy hair is untameable.
Thick lips are unkissable.

At night, I dream of boys with lilting outback accents,
Fluffy hair and untuned guitars.
Eyes the colour of my sun-scorned flesh.
Plaid shirts and Air Forces tumbling through my window,
Kissing cheeks turned red by frigid midnight air.

At dawn, I lay trapped in blackened skin.
Seduced by the vices of my blood.
Branded with the sins of suffering ancestors.
Slurs burned into flesh.

A blood traitor.
A nappy-headed Judas.
Selling her soul for a boy with a Jeep.
Who'd chain up her grandfather in a heartbeat,
If she was born on the winning side.

Amber Amidst Ashes

By Cheuk Wing Kenisha Yeung

Fidgeting on his perch, Beakins' pearly eyes sparkled with anticipation. The yellow-winged budgie had once been a helpless fledgling that had fallen out of a tree. The hooded crows had found him and brought him to their treehouse orphanage. He couldn't wait to finally be accepted as part of the flock.

"Morning, younglings! Do you know what day it is?" a large dark grey parrot greeted them warmly as she waddled into the room with a sling bag over her chest. Two crows followed in silently.

Beakins gathered with the other birds in front of their teacher—a flurry of feathery colours. They chirped in unison, "Joining Ceremony Day!"

"That's right, dears." Macaw May nodded, though her posture seemed more rigid than usual. She walked over to her desk and gestured to the hooded crows, "These gents will be accompanying us today to see things run smoothly."

When the crows settled at the back of the room, Macaw May grabbed the brushes and ink bottles from her bag, placing them neatly on the table. "I'll paint your feathers grey with this special ink."

"Is the ink... permanent?" Beakins asked, his voice quieter when he uttered the last word.

"It might fade during the first few days, but we'll reapply it until it changes your feathers grey forever." Macaw May gave a quick glance at the crows and added, "Anyway, you'll be one of us soon!"

The others cheered, yet Beakins wasn't sure why he didn't feel the same. He wanted this, didn't he? He just never knew all his colours would be lost.

Beakins watched with growing unease as his nestmates of various species lined up to get painted.

The signature red spots on the cockatiel's cheek were gobbled up by ink. The bright yellow of the cockatoo's proud crest disappeared with each brushstroke. Beakins could barely recognise the lovebirds when their watermelon-like colours were gone.

Wrong, wrong, wrong!

When it was inevitably Beakins' turn, his thoughts weighed down each step he took. Standing stiffly by the window, he watched his teacher dip the brush in that forbidding ink.

"Spread your wings, Beakins," came the soft order.

The silver patterns on his yellow wings were

more pronounced as he extended them under the gentle sunlight. Even though it was warm, Beakins had to force himself to stop shaking.

The brush inched closer and Beakins unconsciously shrank back. The grey macaw paused in surprise.

At an instant, the crows' sharp gaze snapped over at the hesitant parakeet. They puffed up their head feathers, displeased.

Beakins mustered up the courage to squeak, "I like my colours. I'm keeping them."

"No! You shouldn't, dear." Macaw May shook her head, eyes darting to the approaching crows every few moments.

"You'll be one of us when you have similar colours."

Pulling his wings close to himself, Beakins protested, "But I don't want to be grey! That's not my colour!"

Macaw May ruffled her ashen feathers and urged, "You are being ridiculous. It's how the flock works. You'll be happier here with the ink."

Happier?

Beakins' mind was set. He held her gaze and insisted, "I know my own happiness."

As the crows lunged for the budgie, Beakins instinctively twisted his body to avoid the capture.

Beakins spread his vibrant wings once more.

Though, this time, towards the vast welcoming sky.



by Liana Wilson



A DREAM I HAD

By Matthew Green

Love is

like looks

of the water's

blue

peeking through

the street. It is

the life of you

seeping into

the cracks

of me.

Stalked by Memory's Daughters

by Irisanya Moon

Tell me, sweet Muses, of the bright sky above,
The one of blue wideness, streaked with wind,
Far above the yellow of an arrival,
nestled in light green,
And screaming.

Muses, you see what is dawning just before,
The slow glow of a horizon,
The promise of warm and clearer sight,
Grant ecstasy in this arrival,
This song that sings itself asleep,
This melody that learns each note
Right before a mouth opens wide.

Prelude

I met Erato on the porch. I was trying to find the door to inspiration, and I thought it would look like a sculpture, defined and shadowed. My creativity always comes to me fast and hard, as though it distrusts my attention span.
Understandable.
Predictable even.
I am not an easy person to pin down, even when I beg to be held.
But we met. Eye to eye. I want to say her irises were shaped like hearts.
I can't remember.
I can only feel that moment on the side of my neck, a warm breath. Willing.

About Love

I have fallen in love many times, sometimes requited, often not. I have fallen in love with three phrases, four colors, and two flowers since breakfast. I have wanted to run away with the cool breeze in this humid place, and to marry the slightly damp and dew-stained grass.
Perhaps that makes me a romantic, or a romanticizer, desperate and willing and able to carve a little slice out of my heart and offer it up.
Here, do with this what you will.
I want you to have this.
I want you to have me.
I want my heart to mean something beyond just keeping me alive.
Anyone can do that.
I start with love, not really the end point, but rather what I honor as the impetus, the push, the sharp nudge between my shoulder blades that might be my heart about to stop or my heart about to start.
The shift.
A change in direction and recognition.
It's not a once upon a time, after all.
It's a many-times-upon-a-time, again and again.
And if I am always starting, what does it mean to begin?

Birth

Mothers can birth poets, by design or damage. Something about unanswered prayers or unkept promises, the kind that get stuck in your teeth and show up when you force a smile.

Or it's the inheritance of a maternal line, conversations whispered or screamed in the middle of a grocery store, when you can't stay quiet for one more fucking minute. And now everyone is looking.

Everyone.

Maybe it should come as a surprise, the way words escape. But weight is a force and hard to stop. What hasn't been said hasn't been allowed to roam, to be fully seen. Even known.

Even now, it's not clear if I screamed or she did or I'm just making it up because I want something to say what needs to be said.

Poetry is born of necessity, born of the disappearing nature of being a daughter. Of being a child who was trouble from the start.

And even if she never said those words, the inflection stalked me. A sharp turn of meaning, a jagged edge of accusation. I was wanted and needed, but I came too early. The room wasn't ready. Her world wasn't prepared.

Inspiration

The Muses' mother was Mnemosyne, or Memory. From her all things were remembered, all things were invited to be balanced on the tip of attention.

In one moment, instantly recognisable.

In another moment, left behind for good reasons.

I don't have to remember everything, just the things that matter.

I allow myself to be enchanted, inspired and stalked by the whispers of daughters, the ones born over nine nights (in some stories).

Erato is a statue in my office, a metal Muse. She tells me to write about Love. She tells me nothing else matters. She tells me that sleep can wait. Reason can be patient with me too, for once. Hope beckons this sort of madness.

Epic poems began with salutations and invocations to the Muses, for their gifts, for their truths.

I began there too.

I would have it no other way.



A Brief Deviation from the Dive Plan

by Adam Al Swed

Darkness was an enemy I struggled with in my youth, a fear I could never quite shake even into my early teens. But as I stood there in the dying light of dusk on the edge of our tiny boat's port bow, fins hanging in the void and legs wobbling precariously with the weight of the diving equipment upon my back, I realised I had never known just how daunting a foe darkness could truly be. It stared back at me now, from that inky abyss, devouring daylight's last gasping breath and lapping in hungry waves at our boat's hull.

Too bad I never saw the boat captain's push coming.

Instead, I plummeted through the black maw of the ocean's surface. Practiced instincts seized hold of me, overwhelming my urge to swallow the sea with a scream as I mashed my flashlight's power button and floundered in that blind, agonising moment before its light flickered to life.

From that moment the dive mostly went on as normal; I stuck close to my partners, pointed out the occasional sea turtle with my beam of light, and revelled in the macabre beauty of a sleeping watery world. Or at least I did…until a sudden current tore the flashlight from my grasp.

I rushed down to grab it. Fins kicking. Hands grasping. Desperate to regain my only weapon against the dark. But the flashlight hit the seafloor before I could reach it, and—in a scene right from the depths of my worst nightmares—turned off.

I was left in that vast darkness, the ocean's beauty no longer so beautiful.

Lost.

Panic instantly overwhelmed my hard-earned diver's instincts, every shaking breath depleting my limited oxygen supply, every inhale bringing me closer to my water grave. I tore at the seabed in desperation, bringing up great clouds of sand and grit that only obscured my vision further.

What do I do, what do I DO. GODDAMIT I CANT S—

Cold metal clinked against my padded gloves. There! Chasing that brief sensation, I lunged blindly in the void, fingers finally, finally gripping tight around my torch. My salvation. It's over. I steadied my breath. I'm safe.

Wrong.

Switching on my torch, I wildly swung that beautiful beam of light to view my surroundings. Left. Straight ahead.

Nothing.

(“) Everything has an end.

And in that moment, as I moved that beam of hope to my right, what little semblance of security I had mustered vanished into those leviathan depths as quickly as it had appeared. In its place was a terror so visceral it was near physical, tightening around my neck like a noose, stealing the breath from my lungs like a thief in the night; for that terror had a name, and it was now inches away from my own face.

Grey skin, mottled with scars. Row after row of razored teeth. Dead eyes that had seen an entire lifetime of slaughter and survival.

We seemed to analyse every inch of each other in that infinitesimal moment, suspended in the endless black as we were. But nothing lasts forever. Everything has an end. And that illusory moment found its own as that shark smashed its tail into my face, sending me spinning backwards as it vanished into the murk.

As a diver, you’re taught to both descend and ascend into the ocean gradually to safely equalise the pressure in your ears and avoid decompression sickness; an important lesson, and one that I paid no heed to as I made a mad dash for the surface, screaming all the way up to the pale gleam of moonlight and raising all hell as I broke the surface of that watery abyss.

The boat found me shivering from freezing cold and fear-induced adrenaline in equal measure, possibly traumatised for life, and drenched in more than just plain seawater from the waist down. But when my parents assured me I would never have to go through a night dive again, I could only grin.

“I’ll be back next week.”

meet the contributors

Ella Nulley – “Lost Time”

“Writing and storytelling have always been a large part of who I am and how I navigate the constant, suffocating thoughts spiralling through my mind. I’ve always felt a special connection to writing because it allows the reader into the author’s internal monologue. *Lost Time* reflects this intimacy, sharing the pain of leaving behind one of the hardest periods of my life – and, with it, the only boy who had ever made me feel alive.

CC Chan – “Mother, the Afternoon Before I Leave” / “Homeland”

CC Chan is a fourth year Advanced Humanities student studying, painting, videoing, and writing around Meanjin. Her work often explores friendships, and the bittersweetness of nostalgia and memory.

Claire Matsika – “Nappy-headed Judas”

Claire Matsika is a young poet from a Zimbabwean immigrant family. Her poetry explores the trials of teenagehood, heartbreak, and assimilating in a world that doesn't make space for people like her.

Cheuk Wing Kenisha Yeung – “Amber Amidst Ashes”

Cheuk Wing Kenisha Yeung enjoys writing short stories and novels. Her work dives into themes of positivity and courage.

Matthew Green – “A Dream I Had”

Matthew Green is a writer from Brisbane. His poems and stories have appeared or are forthcoming in “Island”, “Baby Teeth”, “Meniscus” and “Denizen's Digest.”

Irisanya Moon – “Stalked by Memory’s Daughters”

Irisanya Moon (she/they) is the author of 10+ books on Greek mythology, ritual, and personal empowerment. Her work has been translated into Dutch, reviewed by Publishers Weekly twice, and includes a bestseller (*Aphrodite: Encountering the Goddess of Love & Beauty & Initiation*).

Adam Al Swed – “A Brief Deviation from the Dive Plan”

Adam is a writer who loves writing romance, comedy, and dark fiction/non-fiction in various forms such as short stories, novels, screenplays, and playscripts. His favorite hobbies are trying new foods (the weirder the better) and reading. Two fun facts about him are that he was born on Valentines Day, and has a cat named Tiger.

Khang Nguyen – “A Poem Written by Someone Who’s Never Written a Poem Before”

“Hi, I'm Khang. I come from the world of prose, but I've recently been really interested in writing poetry (shoutout WRIT2100!). I would describe my style as 'experimental', which is to say that it doesn't make much sense.”

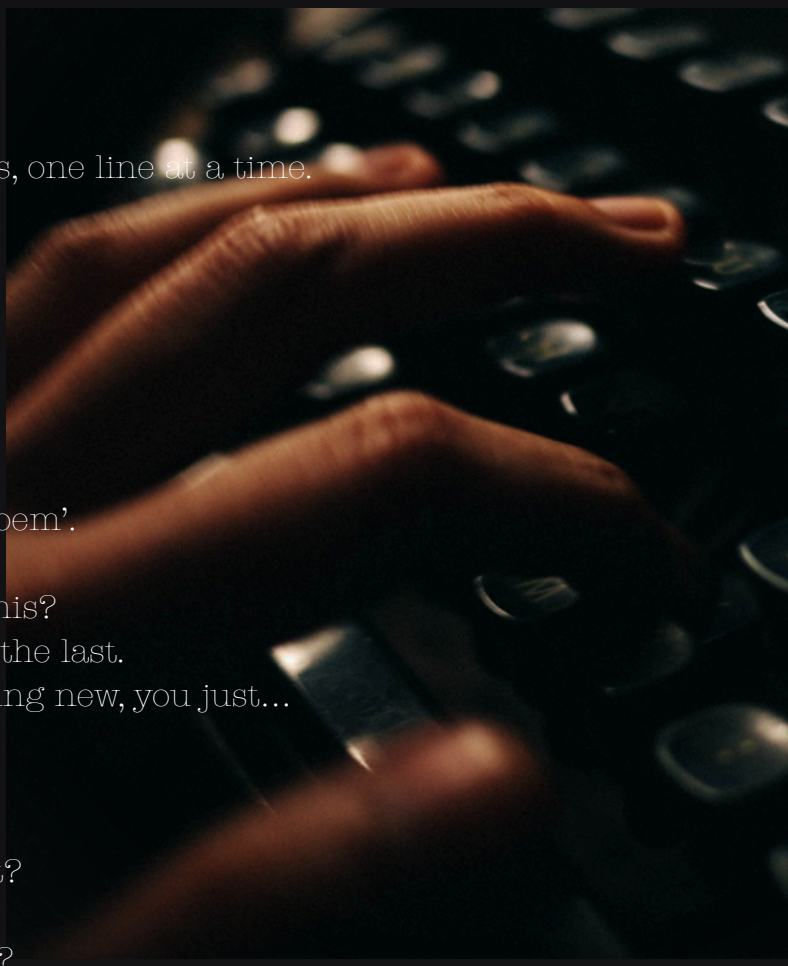
Evangeline Scott – “Deliberations of the Sketchbook”

“I am a young woman creating in my free time. I’m exploring any medium that seems cool at the moment, like linocutting, but drawing has always been my go-to. “

Liana Wilson

Liana is a creative based in Meanjin, but who is geographically inconsistent. She loves capturing the ordinary and the beauty within it, and the special little things the world has to offer.

A Poem Written by Someone



Where do I start?

Can I start here?

And then jump two spaces down like this, one line at a time.

And then do this over,

And over,

And over again.

Until I get something that passes as a ‘poem’.

Or do I have to pack everything in like this?
Each new sentence going right beneath the last.
Then, when you want to discuss something new, you just…

Move on down two spaces.

Stanzas! That’s what they’re called, right?
I learnt that word in Year 6 English.
They’re paragraphs but for poems, right?
I know what a paragraph is.
I’ve written plenty of those in my stories!

I love my stories.
More than any other medium.
All I ever think about is the series that I’m writing at the moment.
The plot,
The worldbuilding,
The characters.

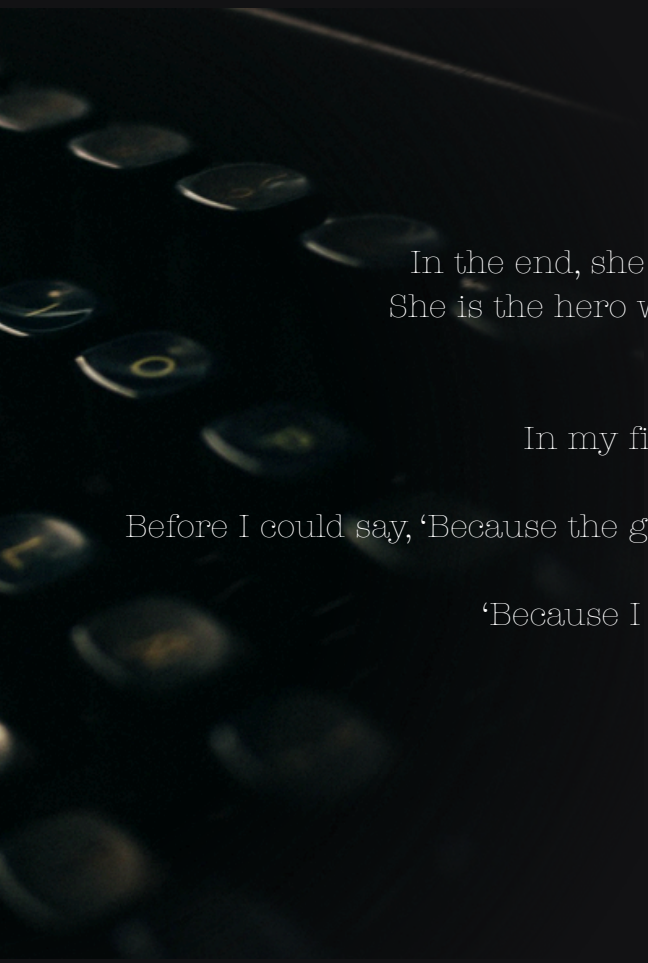
Take my character Penny, for example.
Penny is in her early 20s.

She's a uni dropout, told to leave after failing too many classes.
She has a boyfriend, who doesn't love her very much.
In fact, nobody seems to really love her.
Not the *real* her, she believes.

She is not beautiful enough.

She is not smart enough.

Or creative.



Or interesting.

She is not *good enough*.

She's the main character of my series.
In the end, she sacrifices her life to stop a nigh-unstoppable evil.
She is the hero who saves the multiverse from total annihilation.
Yeah, things get crazy in my stories.

In my first ever poetry class, I was asked why I was here.
Why was I taking this class?
Before I could say, 'Because the genre fiction course isn't offered in semester two',
Something else came to mind.
'Because I want to relate to my friends who all write poetry.'

And it's true.
All my friends do write poetry.
And all their poems are about them.

About clubbing with friends in the Valley.
About growing up neurodivergent.
About a relationship that didn't work out.

And all their words are so beautiful.
And their form is so beautiful.

Who's Never Written a Poem Before

By Khang Nguyen

And they're all so beautiful.

And it's their beauty that highlights my ugliness.

That I am not smart enough.

Or creative.

Or interesting.

That I am not *good enough*.
Not for them.
Not for anyone.

So, I don't write poetry.
I let my stories speak for me.
Because Penny is all of those things.
She is good enough.

Perhaps my issue with poetry isn't its structure,
Or its form,
Or the mechanics.

Maybe it's just me.

Then again, I don't know what the different types of sonnets are.

Or what a villanelle is.

Or a limerick.

And Iambic pentameter.
There's no way that's an actual poetry term
And not the name of a medical instrument, right?

And…

You know what?
Maybe poetry just isn't for me.



"Deliberations of the Sketchbook" by Evangeline Scott


by Liana Wilson

II. rupture / middle

something had to
give

Melissa Karina Mills

Melissa Karina Mills (she/her) is a 21-year-old poet whose work since 2020 has been deeply rooted in Gothic Romanticism, exploring psychological deterioration, melancholia, obsessive longing, and bodily horror through surreal, transgressive imagery often stemming from themes of depression and anxiety.



fossilized

"Corroding heartstrings of a tender violin – colour, a fleeting mirage,
Rotting in despair as my disillusions devour my dreaming soul.
In everlasting nocturne, corridors of time massage me,
Before my ethereal obliviousness betrays, and my nostalgia grows.

Chained within reflections and mirrors, life's beauty moves in aching memory,
Once euphoric in limerence, lingering its bittersweet echoes,
My fragile reminiscences stray, within indefatigable feelings,
Searching for ambiguous epiphanies, yet returning to hiraeth.

Floral tendrils of memory wrangle me into manifesting reverie,
Golden warmth sears me with my acquainted agony,
Violent ruptures of melancholia tantalise my quiet mind.

And so, these memories reign, like a never-ending matryoshka,
shrivelling my sanity, paralysing my reality –
I decay, as the earth moves on."

By Melissa Karina Mills

The Web Ridden Gecko



By Zoe Kirkpatrick

The uniform, shiny, gold band twirled around his finger. He sat on the rusted wheelchair and slightly leaned forward with his elbows on his knees. The fabric armrest covers had begun to fray, and dust had collected on the spokes. In between the two silver footrests, a spider was at work, carefully fiddling with its web. Hundreds of thin silk strands branched between the two footrests, constructing a perfect yet fragile masterpiece. In the centre of this monument, a funnel web spider circled its prey: a small brown house gecko. At first, the gecko struggled, but the closer the spider came, the less it squirmed. It was weak. It was helpless. It was completely at the mercy of the spider. The gecko had realised its fate; it was easier to give up than to fight a losing battle. The man's chest heaved as a thick and rattling cough erupted out of him. He picked up a cigarette and flicked the lighter, a burning blaze springing to life. He looked at the dancing flame, then at the spider. Spider, flame, spider, flame. After switching between them for a moment, he brought the lighter towards the cigarette butt. The bright ember engulfed the end of the butt, and the man took a deep draw of smoke into his lungs.

Thick plumes of smoke filled the air, swirling and flirting with the intoxicating atmosphere that consumed the room.

The man flicked the butt to the floor, flattening it with his cheap but polished boots. He hadn't given up on pretence, not yet at least anyway. He slouched against the raw brick wall, watching from afar as the men at the bar ordered another round of whiskey.

A woman entered his view, tall, almost too tall. She strutted over to him, pretending not to notice the sound of her flats sticking to the vinyl flooring. In comparison, his height was equal to hers, possibly less. Maybe if he stood tall and corrected his posture, he would tower over her; at least that's what he told himself. Her nails caressed his skin, nurturing the crook of his neck and the angle of his clenched jaw while her eyes strayed to the 'Black Widow' vodka bottle nestled in his hand.

"Is this the first bottle?" She asked him, almost rhetorically.

She already knew the answer, but she liked to think otherwise. The man did not hear the question, but instead took a large swig of the liquor, inviting the poison to rush down his throat and fester in his intestines, disintegrating and decomposing him from the inside out. He looked her up and down, at her thighs, hips, stomach, and finally her breasts, heavily accentuated by her dangerously low-cut dress.

His wandering eyes did not surprise her; she was used to it. It was a common occurrence, one she had grown accustomed to, the wandering eyes that granted her opportunities, jobs, and relationships.

But this time it was different, this time the man did not have lust in his eyes… His eyes were filled with venom.

“What the fuck are you wearing!” He spat at her, his slurred speech sending a spray of saliva onto her perfect makeup.

Her face fell, and she sighed softly. “I wanted to look pretty for you.”

“Pretty? You wanted to look pretty? You look like a fucking slut!”

“But Baby—” At this point, she was incomprehensible, his ears were smothered by the battering music from the nearby speakers. She watched him sidestep around her and stumble into the congregation of people on the dancefloor, his face washed away into a sea of drunken faces, scarily similar to the complexion of the man she once claimed to love.

She shrank under his flaming gaze, trying so desperately to disappear. She crossed her arms over her chest and bent her left knee, making herself smaller.

“I’ll drive us home,” she muttered to him softly.

“No you’re fucking not!” He started.

“Come on babe, you’ve been drinking.” She pleaded with him.



“No I haven’t, just shut up and get in the car!”

The man watched her retreat as she buckled her seat belt. She had accepted her lack of power against him. Maybe in the beginning, she wasn't like this, but as the years dragged on, she was eventually pulled below the water's surface, just enough to keep her alive, but just enough to make her beg for air.

Up ahead, bright orbs of light, the edges stretching out, reaching to one another. The pale-yellow tone of the lamp poles reflected onto the asphalt.

A hazy and dreamlike road extended out beyond. All the man could see was a blur before him, yellow, black, grey, mixed together, thrown in a blender, and minced at high speed. The black was everywhere now. Nothing, or more the absence of everything.

(“) She shrank under his flaming gaze, trying so desperately to disappear.

Shattered glass, employed airbags, and a rolling bottle of ‘Black Widow’ in the driver's footwell. The man’s head rested on the white pillow in front of him, his muscles relaxed and calm. Shards of glass jingled in the wind, and the cut on his arm oozed red. He was lucky, suspiciously lucky, not many survive their car embracing a pole at such a high speed. His beautiful wife, on the other hand, was not so fortunate. Her dress was bloodied. She was still. Maybe in some way, she was lucky; her dream of disappearing had finally come true.

Consciousness eventually washed over the man, greeting him with the thick and rancid stench of blood. He shuffled in his seat, allowing his eyes to adjust to the scene. He turned to her, she was peacefully resting in a maroon pool, her eyes softly closed. He couldn’t speak; his throat was suddenly dry, unable to yell or scream. All he could see was the soft freckles embellished on her cheeks and the swipe of glitter that remained on her eyes, he hadn’t noticed earlier, but he did now. After years of chipping away at her, she had finally cracked just enough to shatter, leaving the shards scattered at his feet.

The man knew what he had done, he put her in that car, he killed her... and now he had to live with it.

Its orange tongues licked the palm of the man's hand like a loyal dog, friendly and warm. He winced and slumped further into the wheelchair. The dark green bottle between his legs swished with the sudden movement, its liquid sloshing to each side of the glass. As usual, the spider was busy fussing with its creation, slowly circling its prey and basking in the sweet smell of fear. The man returned to the ember in his hands. Spider, flame, spider, flame.

Flick.

The flame disappeared. He leaned forward in his chair, resting the bottle on the floor, lingering his gaze on the spider and its web. It was beautiful. It was perfect. But the gecko was desperate, it was ready for the poison to rush down its throat and find solace in its stomach, mercilessly destroying it from the inside out. The man could not watch the gecko be killed, so he flicked the lighter for the final time and lifted it to the edge of the web. The flame disintegrated the web, flinging the gecko to the floor. It was no longer squirming. The exhaustion of running was too much for the weak gecko's body. It wasn't free, it was dead, and no beautiful web or soft breeze could hide that.

The man threw the lighter onto the floor and once again stared at the taunting footrests beneath him, expecting to see the empty space between them.

But as usual, the spider returned to its web making; unforgiving and cruel.

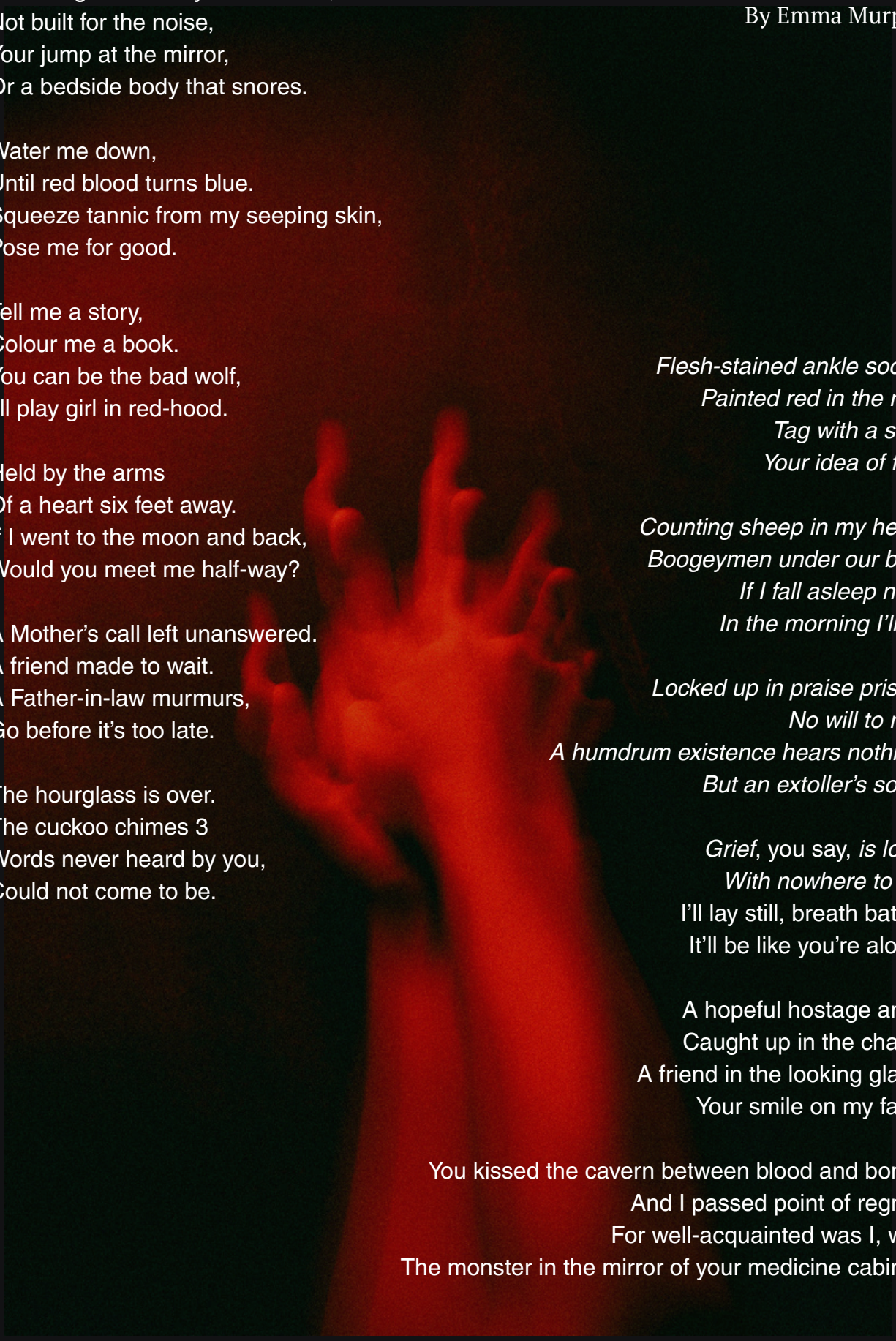
A deep sigh escaped him when he grabbed the nearby bottle, unscrewed the cap, and took a long gulp. He found comfort in the warm taste of it dripping down his throat. The man sat in the wheelchair, and the alcohol found its usual home inside his stomach.

The gecko had finally realised its fate; it was just easier to give up than to fight a losing battle.



The Monster in the Mirror of Your Medicine Cabinet

By Emma Murphy



Some nights I think you're a killer,
Not built for the noise,
Your jump at the mirror,
Or a bedside body that snores.

Water me down,
Until red blood turns blue.
Squeeze tannic from my seeping skin,
Pose me for good.

Tell me a story,
Colour me a book.
You can be the bad wolf,
I'll play girl in red-hood.

Held by the arms
Of a heart six feet away.
If I went to the moon and back,
Would you meet me half-way?

A Mother's call left unanswered.
A friend made to wait.
A Father-in-law murmurs,
Go before it's too late.

The hourglass is over.
The cuckoo chimes 3
Words never heard by you,
Could not come to be.

Flesh-stained ankle socks,
Painted red in the run.
Tag with a shiv,
Your idea of fun.

Counting sheep in my head,
Boogeymen under our bed,
If I fall asleep now,
In the morning I'll be

Locked up in praise prison,
No will to run,
A humdrum existence hears nothing,
But an extoller's song.

Grief, you say, *is love,*
With nowhere to go.
I'll lay still, breath bated,
It'll be like you're alone.

A hopeful hostage am I,
Caught up in the chase.
A friend in the looking glass,
Your smile on my face.

You kissed the cavern between blood and bone,
And I passed point of regret.
For well-acquainted was I, with
The monster in the mirror of your medicine cabinet.

the force of air

By Anonymous

The force of air is harmless. Until it forces a door shut. Until the sound ricochets through your body, adrenaline surging through your nervous system, and suddenly you forget how to breathe. I was sitting on my bed, searching through my calendar, trying to find a time where I had no responsibilities—no classes to attend, no work, no assignments to write, no people to look after. The relentless heat of an Australian summer had filled the house; every window and door was thrown open to catch whatever breeze might pass through. Then suddenly, I heard the door slam shut. I froze. My whole body tensed. I stopped breathing. In that moment, I felt as though my life was in danger. The wind causing my door to slam shut was the first time—and certainly not the last—that I realised leaving violence did not necessarily mean I would feel safe. A child growing up in domestic violence is still technically a child, but childhood itself is stolen from them. Childhood becomes endurance instead of play. Vigilance and survival replace innocence. The child takes on oles that no child should bear: the caretaker, the listener, the peacemaker. We do not get a childhood; we get a never-ending episode of Survivor, with no prize at the end. For the first eighteen years of my life, all I knew was violence. I learned to be quiet, to read anger by the way in which someone moved, to put the wants of others above my needs, to always stay busy but readily available when needed. I learned to survive in a world that was never safe, and I am always on high alert because of that. Every time I enter a room, I look for all the ways I could exit it. Every time I drive, I check my mirrors, watching to make sure no one is following me. If I think someone might be, I change directions entirely. The list of protocols I have in place to ensure my safety is never-ending. I acknowledge that the ways in which I ensure my safety may seem irrational to some. This vigilance did not come naturally; it is a survival mechanism that a little girl, no older than five, created to keep herself safe. The way a five-year-old defines safety should not be the same as the way a woman in her early twenties defines it. Realising this forced me to question how I had come to understand safety at all. Safety is a social construct. It does not exist inherently in nature. It is an idea that society collectively agreed exists. No one can agree on a single definition because context shapes meaning, and individual experiences shape the ways in which safety is defined and felt. This was quite a striking realisation: despite studying the criminal justice system for years, I had never thought of safety as anything but a mandatory outcome for victim-survivors. Safety for me, a woman who grew up in a low socio-economic household with domestic violence, is about having the ability to pay my bills, feed myself, and buy things that I love without constant stress. It is a life shrouded in calmness and peace—void of raised voices, flying objects, and conflict. It is simply moving about in the world unnoticed, as invisible as the air around us. As I reflected on this, I noticed a pattern. For many, safety is found in community, family and the comfort of being surrounded by others. For me, safety is closely tied to my independence and a quiet environment that I have control over.

It is the simple ability to open and close a door and know that nothing on the other side of it is seconds from exploding into chaos. My understanding of safety does not come from a natural preference for isolation; it comes from adaptation. When the person who was supposed to protect and love you is the source of your harm, safety becomes something that you create for yourself rather than something that you receive from others. Independence became my protection. Solitude became my peace. Ultimately, my definition of safety is less about comfort and more about the absence of a threat. This understanding is rooted in my trauma. Trauma scholars explain that when an individual grows up in a dangerous and unpredictable environment, their brain and body adapt to survive. My hypervigilance is protection rather than an overreaction. My constant awareness of others and my need for control over my environment, I can now understand, is a learned survival response. What I once understood as a desire to be self-sufficient now feels more like a survival mechanism shaped by the conditions of a violent childhood. Violence is unstable. I learned that stability could disappear at any moment, so safety became something I tried to build through control—control over my finances, my space, and the people I allowed into my life. My independence is not just my freedom; it is my protection. Feminist scholars have long argued that domestic violence is not only about individual conflict within a house but about systems of unequal power and control that shape relationships. Understanding violence through this lens has helped me reframe my childhood in a way that moves beyond personal blame or family dysfunction. The behaviours I learned—silence, emotional management, self-sacrifice—are common adaptations among children who grow up in violent homes, especially those entrenched in patriarchal norms of authority, dominance, and control. Seeing it this way, survival is not only a personal achievement but also a form of resistance. Growing up in violence may have shaped how safety is understood, but it does not have to determine what safety becomes. My only hope with this knowledge is that one day I can empower the voiceless to achieve the safety that they deserve. For some, something so small as the force of air goes unnoticed. For others, that same force can become a reminder of trauma. Moments that seem insignificant—like the wind forcing a door shut—can have profound effects on those who have experienced violence. The wind may only close a door, but for some of us, it opens memories we never asked to carry.



Where Youth and Laughter Don't Go

by Georgia Burbank

The ashen heavens peek through the charred skeleton of the house whose floor I am pinned to. There's movement in the dust– soft, steady, human. I'm not alone. A figure in the doorway towers over me. She has a gaunt, hollow face with eyes like the last coals of an extinguished blaze. Noticing my gaze, she groans.

"Merde."

French. I try hiding the grimace creeping across my face as she glares. I open my mouth to break the suffocating silence, to ask – nothing comes out. My mantra resounds: I am a soldier. A hero. Part of something noble and necessary.

"Close your mouth. T'es con." The German-French fusion is clunky and discordant.

"Where… what? I – um?" The words pop from my mouth like bullets.

"Fool. They left you. You were injured. Your squad of war-crazed German fanatics abandoned you." She relishes in my bewilderment. "If I had my way, you'd be rotting on the street. However, the Germans made me a deal; my healthcare services in exchange for medicine for my son."

Disturbed, I slowly prop myself up as pain slices through me. Boxes and broken furniture covered by sheets and blankets surround me, ash coating the lot.

I survey my body, inspecting the damage. I grin, easing into my tattered blanket as stabbing pains course through my legs – proof of my bravery. When I return home to my son, I will be a great veteran wearing my scars with pride.

I meet the Frenchwoman's eyes, "They'll return. They wouldn't abandon me. I'm here to recuperate so that I can rejoin my brothers in battle." She studies me carefully – bemusedly – before bursting into boisterous laughter. "Well, I don't know about that. They want you alive, sure, but I doubt *German honour* will bring them back."

She scoffs, then softens. "If I'm stuck with you, I should know your name."

"Friedrich."

"Ah. Elodie."

"For the record, I am going back to fight."

"If you say so, *sweetheart*."

My fingers curl around the tattered blanket over my legs at her patronising tone. "Elodie, you are a mother. You must understand that sacrifice is necessary for a brighter future." She bristles and I ignore her, "My beautiful boy, he believes in me – as a knight, a symbol of justice. Before deployment, I told him great tales of the brave knights who volunteer to

to fight monsters for Germany."

"That's the part that disturbs me – volunteered – you volunteered. When you enlist, you are volunteering to sacrifice life and limb, correct?"

"Yes, of course." I stutter, "Joining the battle to bring glory to Germany."

She stares, eyes glazed over, into a dark corner of the room. "Glory?" She gestures to the skeletal remains of her home. "Your war – the 'Great War' – is nothing but cruelty disguised as duty, arrogance cloaked in honour."

I begin to speak but Elodie interrupts. "I never volunteered for this war. My people didn't want this – yours did – and yet who suffers?" Dust – which I suppose was once her home – clings to my skin. "What are you fighting for? You're nothing but a puppet implicitly trusting a hidden puppeteer. Your politicians send you to fight their war from their protected perches. Do you think the destruction and pain on both sides weigh on their consciences?" She chokes on her anger and tears.

"Elodie –"

"No, they leave that to you; when you get home, to fear sleep knowing everything you've done."

My words catch in the back of my throat, "This is a just and moral war. We struck first to secure our place under the sun." I pause, hearing a politician's familiar speech in my mouth, "You ask what I'm fighting for? I am fighting to get home to my wife and son, having built a better future for them." I spit out, defensively. "When I return to my boy, I will sleep with peace of mind, knowing the sacrifices were to ensure his future."

Again, Elodie stares into the corner of the room, unflinching.

I fight to believe my words as memories of the joyful voices that once filled the house weigh down its beams. A crushed cradle lies alongside small toy soldiers, and I forlornly search Elodie's face for stories and answers. The lines on her face are telling, some trenches and other crinkles, all caked with ash. The trenches are smile lines – the worry and frown lines came later. I soften, "You have a son. You understand sacrifices must be made for them. This is my sacrifice.".

Elodie laughs bitterly, "Sacrifice?" Like a woman possessed, she strides over, and I clutch my blanket. "You think you know about sacrifice!?" A horrible cry escapes her lips as she tears towards the dark corner she was fixated on earlier. She strikes a match, revealing her face contorted into a grimace of rage. "Your war did this!" She rips a blanket off a crumpled shape, then, shaking with grief, holds the match lower, illuminating it for me.

It's just a boy. No older than my son. I am drawn to his eyes – wide-open, jarringly bright and blue amidst his paper white complexion, yet somehow still devoid of light. His blue lips have begun to crack, like the veins on a leaf. He must be wearing his best clothes. I gag slightly imagining a weeping Elodie dressing him up nicely, unable to bring herself to bury him. Despite her best efforts, he is unmistakably a corpse. I think back to her words, medicine for her son in exchange for my health.

He died while she cared for the enemy.

Your war did this.

I stammer, trying to justify this, "Sacrifice. Necessary loss. Honourable cause." I cling desperately to the message I have heard time and time again, familiar as a lullaby. My heart thuds wildly in my chest, refusing to believe what my mouth just said. My legs are numb beneath the blanket, but I grip it tighter anyway, grounding myself.

“You cannot be serious. Look at him. Look at him!” Elodie screams, marching towards me. The boy’s eyes bore into me.

“Please Elodie… *please* cover him back up.” I whimper.

“Why?” She seethes, “Does my Louis make you uncomfortable? Does my noble, necessary sacrifice for our Great War make *you* uncomfortable?”

I gag again. *His name was Louis.*

“And what of your sacrifice? *Necessary*?” She hisses at me, then, kneels at my blanket. Just like with Louis, tears it off me.

My eyes trail down. Deep purple has torn into the flesh just below my hips, framed by leather belts – makeshift tourniquets – outlined by sickly white skin that resembles Louis’. Below it, faded bandages wrap around- I gasp, choking on ash and suddenly, I’m back there.

My eyes tear open as a guttural scream forces itself from my throat, I choke, blood splattering. Ripped from my morphine haze, I am dragged to safety through gravel and pools of blood. I view the destruction. My right leg is in shreds. Skin, muscle, bone, and fabric chase me, desperate to rejoin, but are torn away by rock and debris. My attention is caught by my left leg, held on to my knee like a loose baby tooth to gum. The limb, a ragdoll, bounces and dances on the battlefield in time to the soldiers’ march. We hit a small crater and the fabric and skin holding the remains of my leg rip away.

I cough out the ash; my mind shattered into a million forgotten moments. Elodie’s malice slips into pity as she sees me for the husk of a man that I am, “Your first taste of the price of war. How is it?”

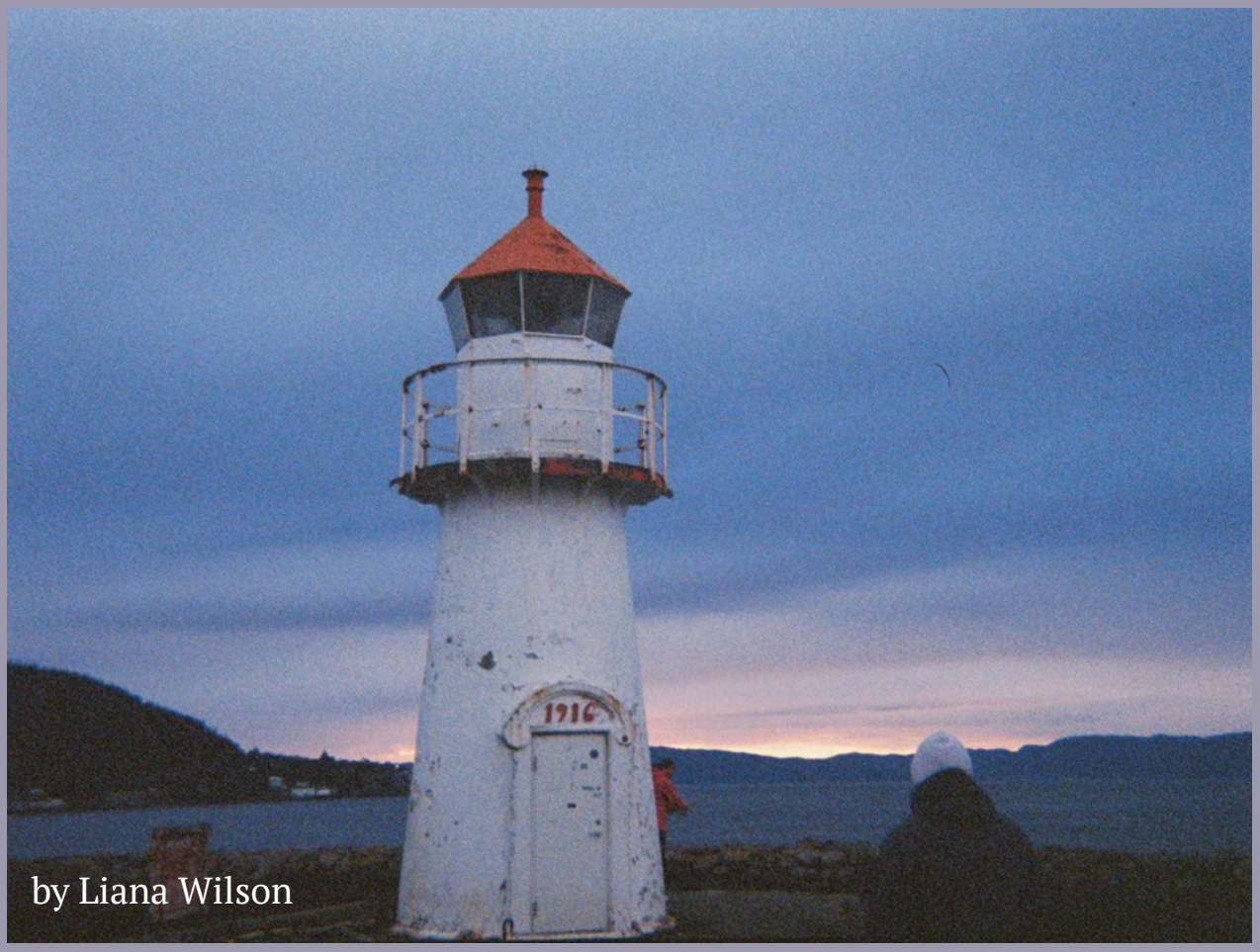
Looking at Louis’ frail hand clasped by his his mother’s, I finally throw up. The bile feels as poisonous as my actions and crumbling beliefs. I’m suddenly inarticulate, desperately murmuring “No, no, no, no”. Elodie, a true mother, smiles reassuringly at me, calming me. “Elodie, we were told you were the threat, the monsters. How many women just like my wife, boys just like mine have I killed for The Great War?” I hear my once zealous voice turn jaded – like Elodie’s, “How am I meant to continue after… this? Elodie… I can’t. Please.”

I process everything I have done, what I have lost and what my future holds. I stare at Louis’ hands, so small just like my boy’s. The world, no, *my people* stole his future. But left me. The pure murdered by me… and I’m still here. For now.

Elodie inches closer, her breath trembling. “Friedrich?”

“Elodie please. I may not deserve mercy, but please. My son… he wouldn’t be proud if he knew the truth. He’d be ashamed, I am ashamed. I can’t live like this… please. *Please*!” I gesture wildly to the tourniquets, once proof of my valour, now a sickly lifeline.

She approaches me and unbuckles the tourniquets. The ash settles on my skin and the skeletal beams sigh, as if remembering echoes of youth and laughter.



by Liana Wilson


by Liana Wilson



boy genius

By Jean Van Zyl

I remember who I am when I'm with you

I remember camping when we were seventeen and you held my hand

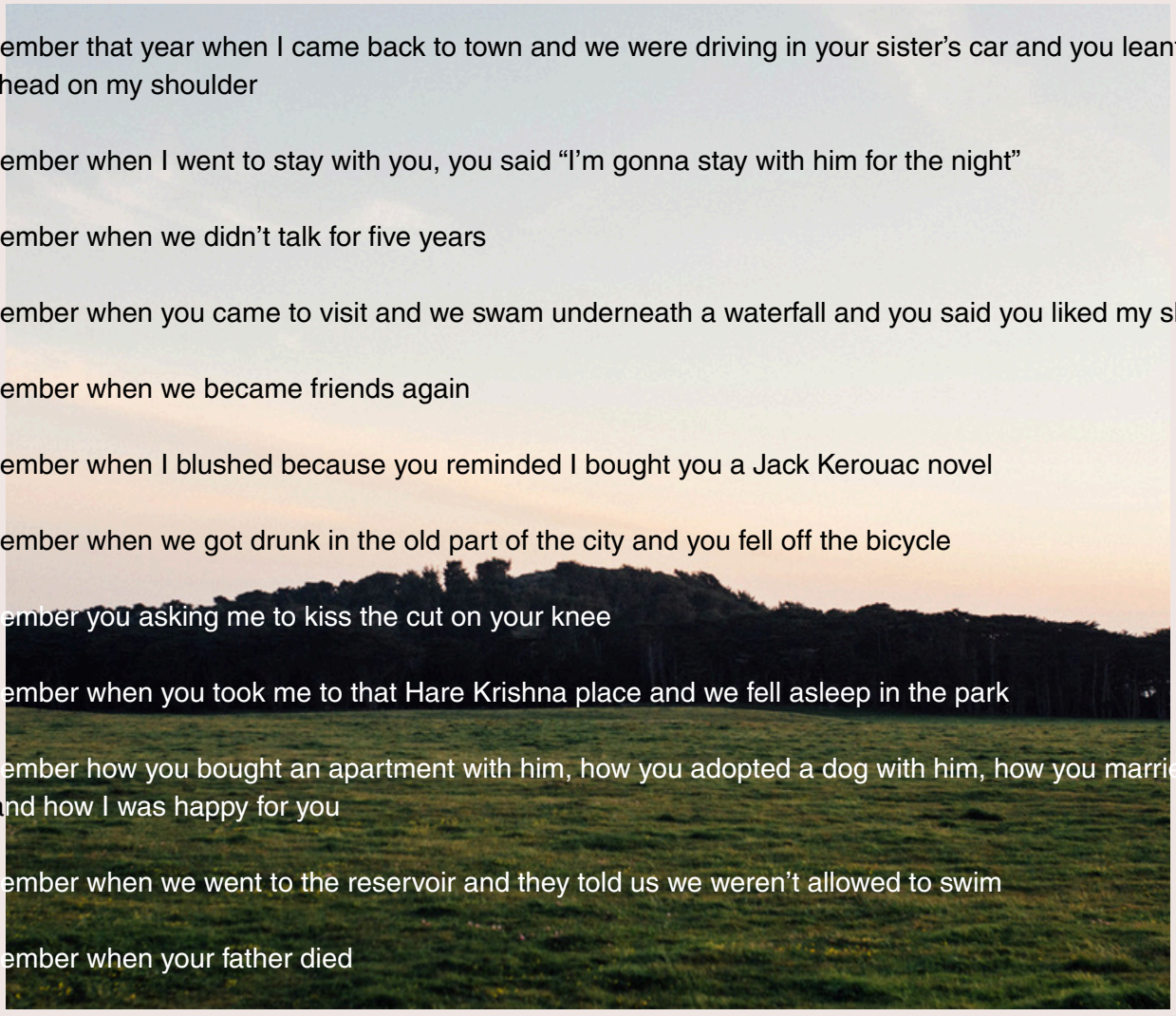
I remember walking over the hill to your father's house and you held up the barbed wire

I remember when the wire caught my skin and I remember I wanted you to kiss the cut

I remember being scared when your father came home early

I remember you beating me at Scrabble, again and again and again

I remember camping when we were nineteen and you held his hand



I remember that year when I came back to town and we were driving in your sister's car and you leant your head on my shoulder

I remember when I went to stay with you, you said "I'm gonna stay with him for the night"

I remember when we didn't talk for five years

I remember when you came to visit and we swam underneath a waterfall and you said you liked my shoes

I remember when we became friends again

I remember when I blushed because you reminded I bought you a Jack Kerouac novel

I remember when we got drunk in the old part of the city and you fell off the bicycle

I remember you asking me to kiss the cut on your knee

I remember when you took me to that Hare Krishna place and we fell asleep in the park

I remember how you bought an apartment with him, how you adopted a dog with him, how you married him and how I was happy for you

I remember when we went to the reservoir and they told us we weren't allowed to swim

I remember when your father died

I remember you didn't cry

I remember hearing that boygenius song on the radio when you picked me up from the airport

I remember trying to call you and then you trying to call me and me trying to call you until we stopped doing that

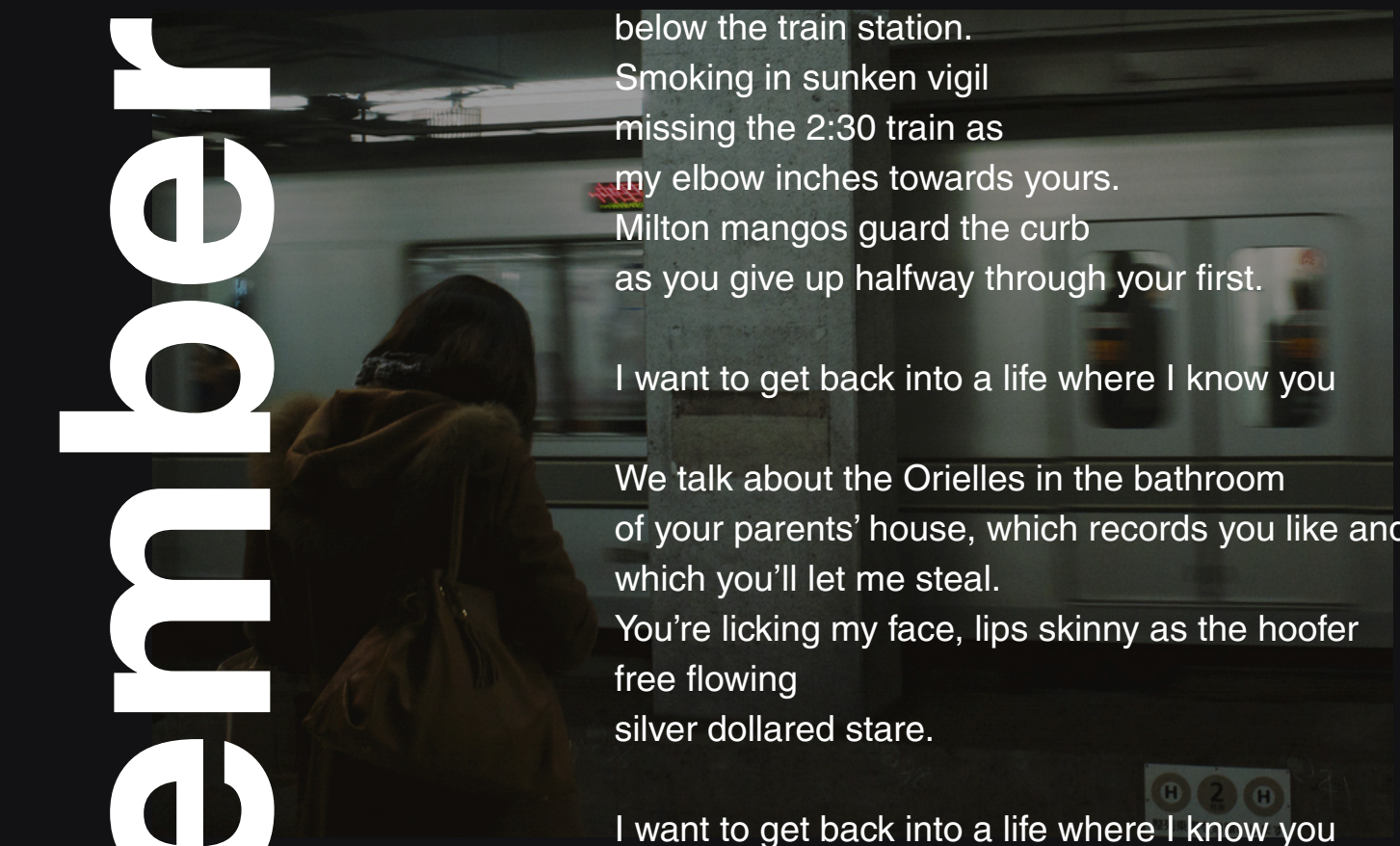
I remember when you told me you were going through a divorce and I talked about how stressed I was

I remember trying to say sorry but you told me not to

I remember who I am when I'm with you

November 4th

by James Riches



You buy your hundredth cigarette
below the train station.
Smoking in sunken vigil
missing the 2:30 train as
my elbow inches towards yours.
Milton mangos guard the curb
as you give up halfway through your first.

I want to get back into a life where I know you

We talk about the Orielles in the bathroom
of your parents' house, which records you like and
which you'll let me steal.
You're licking my face, lips skinny as the hoofer
free flowing
silver dollared stare.

I want to get back into a life where I know you

Moon shapen swirling amber
eyes intertwined.
It's 2am and we decide not to sleep.
You ask me to tell you a story.
But they're always sad.
"I don't mind."

I want to get back into a life where I know you

I've been marinating Salmon for the past 4 hours
and it still tastes the same.

poetry / 50

You say “It’s lovely”
underseasoned and undercooked.
I play Pure on the record player upstairs.
You don’t know it and kind of half like it,
but I pick the right song to
read you the scraps from my note’s app
hoping you’ll find me clever.
Half my lines are stolen, and you don’t say a word.

I want to get back into a life where I know you

It’s late summer and you’re stoned by proxy
Rain careens down on steel awnings
half the porch is soaked.
You’re wrapped in my arms
silken knot of extremities.
“Why do things have to change.”
We’re brought to it
like turtles to their birthplace
we just don’t know the path or else
I would’ve told you by now.
You’ll find a way through it.
Sleep-bitten you lay on my lap

I want to get back into a life where I know you

Sunk in malic
Rotting teeth
Serrated headaches.
Every dream feels like running backwards.
I suppose it’s all backwards
since letting go of you.

I’m always looking for some grand meaning.
Why every dream is getting you back and
every nightmare is losing you again.
There’s nothing to it,
I’m just sad I won’t be the one dragging you down.



“Homecoming”
by CC Chan

9.9

by Hashen Ratnayake

earthquakes are recorded on a scale of 1.0 to 9.9,
from whispers to permanent change.
whispers happen on the daily,
close by or far off. the others hit here
and there, now and then.
we see an 8.0 - 8.9 once a year; primal violence—
once a year.

9.0 through 9.9 occurs, once every century or so.
averaged out to a human lifespan
that's once a lifetime.
sometimes, not at all.

a 9.9: once per life. maybe apparent
maybe off in the oceans—
but once.
its scale would go unregistered until it's far too late
starting as whispers; then tremors
felt under the skin // before it is known;
heard—then new terrain.

it has been a cold autumn. years have come
and gone—
i am just now accepting it.

Small Acts of Illumination

The lanterners knew the trees would only light after dark. Small forests of lanterns, varied of height, dotted the countryside where farmers and civilians would wander amidst the flickering thickets. They glowed brighter when they were spoken to; write them a sonnet and a fresh branch would grow, and it might even bud a tiny bulb, glowing dimly under envelope folds.

Lantern trees lined the boulevards of the city, and poets and beatniks wandered the streets at night, lighting the trees with verse and prose, lanterns illuminating in ways ever changing. The main thoroughfare led to the central museum, which, glowing with ivy, sprouted trees from its floorboards. Paintings inspired by the illuminated halls dotted the walls, framed by ever growing, ever branching boughs.

Heven was a lone poet, his face pale and unlined by concern, his uncombed hair brown and trailing at the collar of his velvet coat. The stockings at his calf were an unruly pattern thought unfashionable only by those who didn't understand their relationship to the bloomers he wore, which – to be fair - only he could see. He was amusing his favourite lantern tree with a verse inspired by his recent affiliation with carnival folk when he heard a clanging and a pounding coming from across the street. Someone was constructing an unfamiliar form on the dark side of the boulevard.

The man was clad entirely in colourless drill, with a hairline so jagged it could pick locks. He was installing a large steel pole, with an inelegant bulbous cap on its crown, so flawed in its design it summoned notions of a boil about to burst.

'Lo!' Heven called, flagging the overalled man installing it. 'What do you call that?'

The worker looked up at Heven, re-focused his eyes for a moment, then shrugged and kept working. Heven trotted up to him, calling out.

'Hello there good sir, would you mind ever so much…'

'We won't be needing you lot much longer,' interrupted the man, continuing to work without looking up. 'These lamps will make all the light the city needs, without you bohemians needing to fill the night with your nonsense.



‘Lanterns lighting on their own?’ Heven said.

‘On their own,” the worker said firmly.

Heven rapped on the steel post with his knuckles. It made a hollow echo that reverberated in his bones. He whispered to it a verse he had written last winter, when the frost had caused a small window in an abandoned alley to freeze over, re-creating a missing pane of glass. It was his favourite verse, the one he had had the most success with, even in the museum where lanterns were accustomed to elevated acts of illumination. But the lamp did not light until the overalled man made his final adjustment and flicked a switch.

Heven’s eyes widened. He felt something in the pit of his stomach that he had never felt before.

‘Never mind though, look!’ said the man, smiling for the first time. ‘You’ll have more time now, you can get a real job, like a real man. That there factory is hiring.’ He pointed at a tall building a few blocks over, as steel-cold as the lamppost.

Heven watched him work. The overalled man didn’t hum, he didn’t talk, he didn’t recite a single line of poetry. Yet the lights blazed on. The light was harsh, buzzing, and made Heven’s back teeth tingle. The overalled man was already halfway down the street, installing the next lamppost.

Heven returned to the lantern tree where he had begun his night. He looked up at its swirling branches, each bud of light grown from his verses, and from other poets like him, over countless years shaping the ornate and entirely unique shape of the tree. One could sit in it and be surrounded by light, its verses still lingering in the air should one want to hear them.

He reached out to the lantern he had lit earlier that evening. The light was slowly draining out of its incandescent foliage, pooling at his feet, trickling away into the sewer. Soon it would be dark, and Heven could no longer remember the verse that had caused it to light.

By Victoria Woods

Victoria Woods is a writer from the Sunshine Coast, currently studying for her Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Queensland. She believes a story should create a heightened emotional effect on the reader, and her work often features academic, methodical, sometimes melancholic prose with elements of fairytale, representing themes of unrest under layers of whimsy and surreal social commentary.



“Deliberations of the Sketchbook” by Evangeline Scott



The Call of the River

by Ruby Logan

I can still hear the river. The subdued trickle of water passing lazily downstream calls to me like a siren song. The kookaburra's dissonant laughter rebounds off the arms of the gilded gum trees, which contort themselves towards the heavens. The sun caresses my face, leaving a trail of red, tender kisses along my body. The river's crystal blue waves glide their soothing hands along the riverbank, washing away layers of dirt with each purifying sweep. I can still see it all. I can still see her.

Surrounded by the overpowering beauty of the river, the paintbrush clasped in my hand remains immune to its spell. As my paintbrush runs across the canvas, all I can paint is her.

Her little, golden ringlets bouncing around her ears. Her full, pink cheeks blooming brighter than any rose. Her button nose scrunched in concentration. But I never could capture the sparkle in her green eyes.

Her laughter wraps around me like a blanket as the river laps over her feet to protect her from the world. As I continue to bless the canvas with her purity, she turns around and flashes me a wide, gummy smile. I place my paints down and kneel on the floor, my arms outstretched, inviting her home. Her melodic giggles skim across the water as she slowly crawls towards me. I almost have her in my arms as she calls, "Mummy, mummy—"

A gentle prick in the crook of my arm snaps me back into my body as a nasally voice overpowers the whispers of the gum trees.

"That should clear some of the fog away." A cool liquid warms my body as the pressure in my arm subsides. The fuzziness at the edge of my vision clears as a small, faceless man sitting across from me comes into focus. The song of the river lapping against the shore dies in my ears as I watch two beady eyes push through his skull and onto his face.

He starts moving his hands around as a long, hooked nose and pale, thin lips melt through his blurred skin. He is covered head to toe in white as if he were a chameleon blending in with the white walls, floor and ceiling surrounding me.



Liana Wilson

The white walls stretch their cold fingers into every corner of the room. Every crevice, every nook, every cranny is touched by its apathetic embrace; I can feel it brushing against the side of my leg. The man leans forward in his chair to draw my focus back towards his painted smile.

“Mary,” he begins again, his stale breath digging under my skin, “have you been dreaming again?” I try to focus on his question, but a clock ticking in the background reminds me of the steady flow of the river’s current and the promise of its hands.

“Where is my daughter?” I murmur as my hand spasms at my side, itching to return to painting my baby girl and my river. “Where is Rosie?”

The beady-eyed man continues to stare at me like a puzzle missing a piece. He leans further forward in his chair as I sink back into mine, desperate to move away from the musty smell leeching from his pores and the hands of the white walls resting upon his shoulders.

“Do you think about Rosie often?” the man begins hesitantly as if speaking to a small child. His face vanishes again, now a smudged blur that makes my stomach squirm.

“I think about that day at the river,” I reply, as a breeze strokes my back and cool water burrows between my toes. “I think about how everyone was trying to take her away from me.” A steady stream of tears falls down my face as the faceless man grows back his hooked nose and scribbles something down.

“You have to bring her to me. No one else can protect her.”

“I will see you tomorrow, Mary,” he mumbles before reaching for the door and disappearing into the walls. I am alone in the vacuum of colour.

The faint ticking of the clock grows louder in my ears as Father Time forgets me. I ball my hands into fists to keep them from trembling, to keep them from reaching out to cradle Rosie. *Tick*. I feel like I’ve been punched in the stomach as my breathing becomes shallow and my vision twirls in front of me. *Tick*. The walls of my cocoon slowly close in on me as my white room rests its suffocating hands of loneliness upon my shoulders, trapping me under their immense weight.

As the bars of my prison fortify before my eyes, an eerie creak snaps my neck around. The door is open. He forgot to lock it. I slowly stand and creep towards the door, a single shard of gleaming, yellow light piercing the barren room. Its vibrant glow transports me back to the river, reminding me of the sun's warmth, as the sound of babbling water bleaches into the room.

(“) My hand begins to tremble uncontrollably as the river calls me home.

Reaching forward, I carefully push the door open, and an endless, winding corridor greets me. I step into the hall, but instead of the cool, white floorboards that sting my bare feet, rushing water tickles my heels, rising above my ankles and gripping onto my legs.

Desperate to find my Rosie, desperate to save her, I sprint down the hallway when suddenly my knees give out as I collide with a figure clouded by a musty odour.

We go sprawling to the ground, but the familiar laughter of kookaburras floods my ears, forcing me to claw forward over the motionless form.

The sun breaks through this murky prison and licks my face as the white walls swirl around me. The walls release a symphony of screams as vibrant, green leaves engulf them, and the river washes them away. It's as if I never left. Rosie is in my arms. Safe. Her curls tickle my nose as I continue further into the river's embrace. Its cool water brushes against my knees, sending goosebumps along my arms.

"You are so beautiful," I whisper to Rosie, who only giggles in response. "The river can protect you now." I place a ghost of a kiss on her cheek before I succumb to the call of the river.

A phantom guides my hands as I remove Rosie from the nook of my arms. The kookaburras stop laughing. I brush the hair from her eyes and kiss all her fingers and toes. The trees have stopped chatting. I float Rosie on top of the water, and she looks up at me with a trusting smile. The river has stilled; it lies in wait.

Ever so gently, I push Rosie into the sanctity of the water and watch it consume her. I can feel her struggling beneath my hands, fighting the river, but she is too young to understand that the water is sharing its secrets with her. It will protect her.

"Not long now, baby girl, soon you will be pure." Then it all stops.

The river releases my daughter, placing her back in my arms. I walk towards the riverbank as a deafening silence follows behind me.

Looking down at the bundle pressed against my chest, tears overcome me as I see the familiar blue of the river brushed across Rosie's face. Her once sparkling eyes, now glassy, are as pure as I always hoped she could be. Now I know how to capture her eyes, now I can finish my painting.

"You will be safe forever," I whisper in Rosie's ear as she lies still in my arms. "The river has you now."

Humming a gentle lullaby, I rock back and forth on the cold floor as the trees disappear, the river dries up, and the warmth of the sun evaporates. The white walls creep back into view as Rosie's green eyes turn beady and red spiderwebs crawl across the whites of her eyes.

Her golden curls, which twisted around her ears shrivel, their deep, honey-like colour now a polluted grey. Her flushed, chubby cheeks, which I used to kiss every night before tucking her in, are now sunken and sallow. Rosie's button nose, once mirroring my own, is now long and hooked.

Looking down, instead of Rosie's bundled form encased in my arms, I find my hands wrapped around the neck of a still figure dressed head to toe in white. As the colour drains from his face, he becomes one with the white walls, his clothes blending perfectly with his surroundings as they call him home.

Ruby Logan

"I am currently a third-year Arts/Law student at the University of Queensland, majoring in Writing and English Literature. My writing primarily focuses on short stories that blend gothic undertones with vivid imagery and lyrical prose, and I'm particularly interested in exploring atmosphere and character psychology."



don’t look away.

By Anonymous

don’t turn it off.

I feel like going to the ends of the earth -
finding a solitary cliff and,
screaming
right
off
the
edge,
letting it spiral into the abyss.

Everything is so loud -
I don’t know how anyone can go about their day in silence.

Do they not know?
Right now,
a father searches blindly for his daughter,
his ears ringing with the sound of explosions.
At the same time,
incels drop bombs on the internet from the safety of their glass palaces.

Did you know?
Girls are murdered for daring to educate themselves.
Still.
It’s 2026.
(I think that’s meant to mean something).

There are children in this world
whose little bellies swell with hunger,
and there is nothing to fill them with.
Somewhere else,
there are girls in huge houses,
who are hungry and happy about it,
and are eaten alive every day in their own heads.
Am I holding up a mirror?

poetry / 62

I know it is hard to take up space in this suffocating society.
I know sometimes you just want to put the pillow over your head,
block it all out.

But we can't keep quiet,
when we know how much suffering exists.
Every night, I go to sleep in the comfort of a warm bed,
while another girl sleeps in the streets,
with one eye always open,
so does she ever really sleep?

Could you explain how that's fair?
What's the difference between me and her?
Here's the truth –
I was just born lucky
and she wasn't.

So how does anyone stay silent?
There's a special kind of privilege in watching struggle through a screen,
changing the channel when it all gets too much.
But it doesn't end when you turn it off,
if you keep pretending it doesn't exist.

Remember -
the only reason that's not you is because you're lucky.
So, when it all gets too much,
don't be silent.
Scream.

some names you should know

Zoe Kirkpatrick – “The Web Ridden Gecko”

“My name is Zoe and I have always loved writing as a creative outlet. I am a curious person who loves discovering the unknown, and writing gives me the space to explore and empathize with perspectives I otherwise would never be able to.”

Emma Murphy – “The Monster in the Mirror of Your Medicine Cabinet”

“My work is shaped by the experience of coming of age, with half-baked poems attempting a retrospective post-mortem: to grieve the girl and reconcile with the past. “

Anonynous – “The Force of Air”

“For me, writing is a way to understand myself. Sharing my work is quite hard as it takes an incredible amount of vulnerability. For the work I choose to share, I hope that others feel less alone. I hope that people move through the world with greater kindness, patience, and empathy. By putting my writing into the world, I am teaching myself that being vulnerable does not automatically mean being hurt. A very dear friend once told me, vulnerability is power, and empathy is the pathway to safety.”

Georgia Burbank – “Where Youth and Laughter Don’t Go”

“My name is Georgia, I'm currently studying psychology but hope to study Occupational Therapy. I wrote this short story for a literature assessment in year 12 and thought it would be nice to give it new life in this journal. “

Jean Van Zyl – “boygenius”

Jean is a writer living and studying in Brisbane. They like birds, swimming at the reservoir, and reading.

James Riches – “November 4th”

James is a poet, lover and former desperado, originally hailing from the Wide Bay region, now calling Brisbane home. To P, who taught me what real love is and who makes every room warmer. Each day I seem more sure that every path leads back to you.

Hashen Ratnayake – “9.9”

Hashen Ratnayake is a Meanjin-based Sri Lankan poet whose work circles attention as it moves; sideways, associative, in-and-out of memory. His poems centre on lived experiences and the unmaking of language.


by Liana Wilson



This Kid Gives Me The Creeps! An Exploration of the Role and Effect of the Child Within the Gothic: Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* and Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby*

"If the child gives the effect another turn of the screw, what do you say to two children?" Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw.*



Freud's 1919 essay The Uncanny examines the instance in which something feels familiar and yet unfamiliar simultaneously. He argues that this feeling is not unknown but repressed, a return of some childish fear that momentarily is truer than our adult understanding and worldview "when the primitive beliefs we have surmounted seem once more to be confirmed" (Freud 17). Within the Gothic genre this uncanny feeling is manipulated to create a horrific sense of the sublime, artists are able to create a feeling of terror and awe as something so familiar transforms horrifically.



Thus leaving the audience with a sense of a “vertiginous and plunging” paramount and then a dive further within the sphere of humanity's most primitive fears (Smith 11). Numerous narratives within the Gothic genre create this sensation through the use of children, as they are innately vulnerable and more susceptible to irrational fears. This forces the audience to confront the unresolved fears of their childhood as the instinctual anxieties and fantasies of the infantile self actualise before them. Through the use of the uncanny child, Roman Polanski’s Rosemary’s Baby and Henry James’ Turn of the Screw present children as a spatial metaphor for the in-between, an intermediary representative of life and death, the unknown supernatural and the known natural. Thus leaving the audience with a sense of a “vertiginous and plunging” paramount and then a dive further within the sphere of humanity's most primitive fears (Smith 11). Numerous narratives within the Gothic genre create this sensation through the use of children, as they are innately vulnerable and more susceptible to irrational fears. This forces the audience to confront the unresolved fears of their childhood as the instinctual anxieties and fantasies of the infantile self actualise before them. Through the use of the uncanny child, Roman Polanski’s Rosemary’s Baby and Henry James’ Turn of the Screw present children as a spatial metaphor for the in-between, an intermediary representative of life and death, the unknown supernatural and the known natural. Outside the frame of Gothic fiction, the child is a symbol of innocence and vulnerability; within the Gothic genre however, the child has come to represent a rupture of reality, a menacing evil inhabiting a small fragile form “a site without borders” (Froud 120). The Turn of the Screw and Rosemary’s Baby transmutates the symbol of the child into something deeply uncanny, a representative of the return of childish and irrational fears, as the child transforms into something that is both the same and horrifically different. It is this transformation into the unknowable that arouses dread and creeping terror in the audience, “the ugly transformation of something specially familiar [...] which excites the feeling of nervous apprehension” (Shuttleworth 89). Henry James and Roman Polanski both manipulate this ambiguous fear to create the effect of a sublime yet uncannily disturbing theme throughout their work as the symbol of the child is transformed into something vague and menacing. This creates a dreadful sense of the sublime, as a wave of terror and awe simultaneously washes over the audience. The terrifying aspect of the Gothic child is the contrast between what we know a child to be and the monstrous figure that is presented. For instance, in Rosemary’s Baby, the slow creeping realisation that the protagonist’s unborn child is not as it seems presents the film’s true horror, “‘What have you done to him? What have you done to his eyes?’ [...] ‘He has his father’s eyes.’ […] ‘Satan is his father, not Guy!’” (Polanski 2:10:18-38). . Rosemary’s terror grows as she realises that the baby she bore and carried to term was not as it seemed, that she has given birth to the literal antichrist.

This gives the effect of the sublime and uncanny to the audience as Rosemary's irrational fear manifests rationally in the form of her offspring. This dreadful uncanny feeling is mirrored in James' The Turn of the Screw as the author initially presents the children to be the pinnacle of good behaviour, but as the protagonist spirals through the story, the children are slowly revealed to be increasingly malevolent; playing tricks on the governess and seemingly communicating with the dead.



"What it was least possible to get rid of was the cruel idea that, whatever I had seen, Miles and Flora saw more - things terrible and unguessable that sprang from dreadful passages of intercourse in the past. Such things naturally left on the surface, for the time, a chill that we vociferously felt."

This is the effect of the uncanny, as the familiar is revealed to be anything but. James and Polanski utilise this symbol of the child to instil a feeling of growing dread or suspense within the audience, a technique that is prevalent throughout Gothic fiction.

In the Gothic genre the child can be seen as symbolic of a spatial metaphor for the inbetween space that is usually representative of an intermediary between life and death or the natural or supernatural, " a terror and even an enemy" (Buksyk 3). The symbolic child serves as a gateway between the irrational repressed fears of childhood and an adult audience, allowing these doubtful fears to appear greatly more realistic. Thus the role of children in Gothic fiction bridges the primitive and instinctual fears of humanity to the lucid adult mind of the audience. This symbolic child is exemplified in Polanski's Rosemary's Baby and James' The Turn of the Screw as each artist uses the motif as a mode to introduce elements of horror or the fantastical within their work, utilising child characters to act as an intermediary between the natural and supernatural, forming a realistic and digestible source of irrational fear that is slowly introduced both within the works and tonally to the audience. In Rosemary's Baby, the protagonist's newly born child fills this role perfectly as the child itself is a half-breed; born of a human mother and fathered by the literal devil, thus becoming a true intermediary between the real world and the supernatural. The child also offers a metaphorical bridging of the familiar and unfamiliar, as Rosemary's pregnancy slowly introduces strange instances into the narrative.This is reflected in the mannerism of her husband and neighbours who manipulate Rosemary under the guise of old wives' folk tales in order to subdue her, penetrating Rosemary both mentally and physically. In contrast, the children in The Turn of the Screw are vaguely portrayed as intermediaries between life and death, as the governess believes they are reaching beyond the veil and communicating with the dead.

"The answer to my appeal was instantaneous, but it came in the form of an extraordinary blast and chill, a gust of frozen air and a shake of the room as great as if, in the wild wind, the casement had crashed in. […] So for a moment we remained, while I stared about me and saw the drawn curtains unstilted and the window tight. "

The children are accused of having a relationship with the ghosts that supposedly haunt Bly Manor, and thus literally introduce the supernatural elements of the story to the reader, "'Why the candle's out!' I then cried. 'It was I who blew it, dear' said Miles." (James 69).

The majority of instances in which the story has a direct reference to paranormal occurrences, the children are directly present within the scene, positioned as an accomplice or gateway between the governess and the ghosts.

Ultimately, within Gothic fiction the symbolic child is positioned as an intermediary between the realms, either life and death, or the natural nand supernatural. The symbolic child is used to introduce an irrational fear that commonly has been repressed within the adult understandings of the audience, thus creating a spatial metaphor representative of the realms of the natural and supernatural. This is done to the effect of the uncanny, as the familiar child is transformed into something horrific yet recognisable; a bridge between two identities and two worlds.

Gwen Phillips

Gwen Phillips is an undergraduate student studying English Literature and History, with a particular interest in folklore and fairytales. She writes essays about film, literature and popular culture, pertaining to the supernatural, the strange and the sublime.




by Liana Wilson

III. aftermath / departure

and yet, here
we are

Privilege Will Not Save Us

By L.A. Neal

I am privileged,
despite my queerness,
because I can close my eyes
to flames and starvation.

Despite my queerness,
I can turn away
from flames and starvation,
with blissful ignorance.

I can turn away
from war and murder
with blissful ignorance
and the sacrifice of morals.

From war to murder,
I can pretend it's from another world
with the sacrifice of morals
just like many others.

I can pretend it's from another world,
acting like my future is still bright –
just like many others –
biding my time.

Acting like my future is still bright,
I crave the certainty I was promised,
biding my time
in this deteriorating world.

I crave the certainty I was promised
by those who caused
this deteriorating world,
burning itself into my eyelids.

Those who caused
the flames of war to rearise,
burning into my eyelids,
haunting me.

The flames of war rearise
because I closed my eyes
haunts me.
I am privileged.

Ode for the Morning



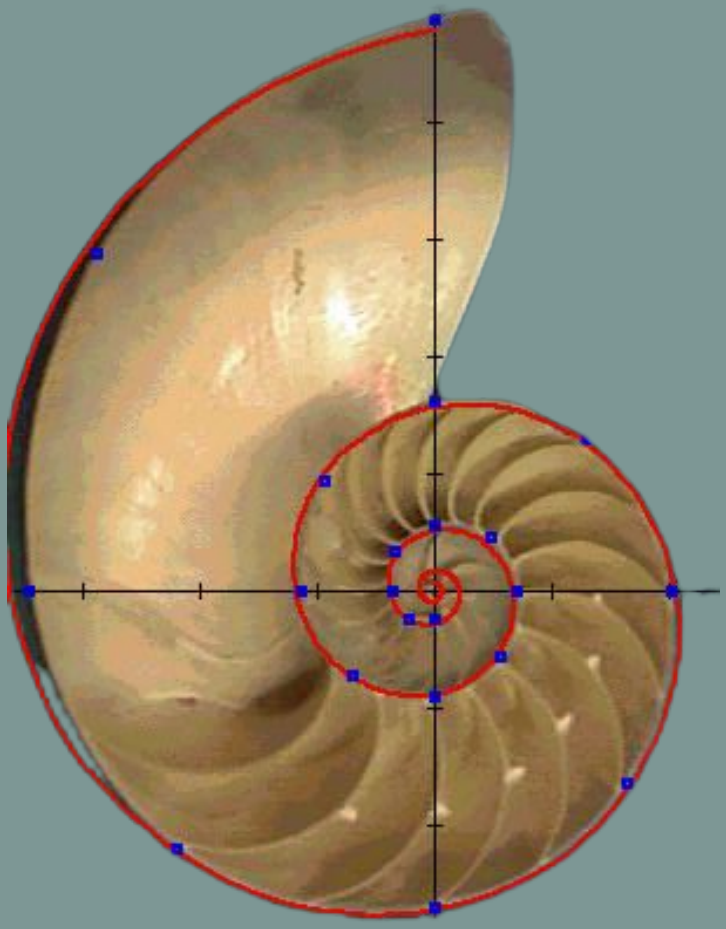
By Tyra Arthur

To think that you died this morning –
and up there you fell
to your knees,
promising, promising
that you would not squander
yet another chance.

Pull off your wolf skin,
off over your hips.
Your delicate lines,
worked hands sigh
to make it a foreign body.

Emerge from your scallop shell.
Tracing, trading dermis to cervix.
Comparison is a test;
there are too many faces in the world,
too many faces in the world for that.

You are returned, you are returned
to the small joy of breathing,
to the small joy of a peach,
to the small joy
that you are yet to live.



Permission Slip Withdrawal

by Callum Ede

I march forth strong and tall through the storm,
The winds of change have come; they collide with the peaceful Pisces New Moon.

My legs pine as I pave my path,
Proven by bullets of lead, my hamstrings stacked with lard.

Payback for slaving in my room, glued to the screen,
The eye of the storm saw me fawn and saw me freeze.
The pain of withdrawal pulled past the mask,
This four-walled coma I cast cannot last.

5 years ago, I felt the same.
My mates, we reached the mountains peak,
But ripped shorts and rippled quads were only Stage 4.

COVID had hit, I bunkered in,
Just me, the screen and the white-noise of therapy's receipt.

"You don't have to see anyone again,
Just do the deed and zombie the hell out!"

The storm berated, begging me to wake,
Its eye searing my conscience until I change my ways.
I cashed in my permission slip,
But his stare, his spite will never quit.

The winds of change cupped within my sail, I could, "Kamehameha!"
With a huff and a puff, I was the one walking tall and feeling tough.

So, I willed myself back to a time that hurt;
Where pain persisted and scars crept in shadows to piss ups in the park.

COVID was tough ‘cos I hid;
I screwed myself ‘cos I didn’t reach out,
I sheltered and sunk ‘til I flipped my lid.

But this March, the eclipse is on my side:
A tide line between my two selves,
Each cry clasping my lead-filled legs at night.

“When we lose power, you’ll be free!
No Instagram, no YouTube.
Screw the rest, this is for us,
Take the test and become just like God.”

Enough is enough! I’m feeling the pain, willing to fall, willing to fail.
I’ll portal these four walls from Kanas to Oz;
They won’t stop me from meeting the Wizard,
I’ll set my legs free, and stare into his eye:

“Cyclone Alfie, tear down your disguise,
Face me like a warrior, gauntlet out, life on the line!”

I sought a stick as a sword, my paws absorb the pain, my breath will fill this cave.
A wave of bliss, my spine it shifts my chakras align,
Curbing the doubt within my mind, this is it, this is the time!

Ablaze, my sword slices invisible vines entrapping my veins;
Tusks with movement, chains that grew thick inside those fragile four walls.
With each vine diced, a Band-Aid torn:
A hole opens, yearns to be filled with love instead of the void of simping soft porn.

The eye of the storm smirks, the student becoming the master,
Sovereign, sublime, the Sun it shines, the moon eclipses in my zodiac sign.
I am free to live life untangled, untethered, my hamstrings now strung unleaded.

The dark night of the soul fuels my fire,
My sword, an eternal flame, framed to call upon my deepest desires.

No storm will shudder my stance, nor silence my rudder of reason.
I withdraw this permission slip for a new one.
One that frees me; one that offers balance to breathe and tears to release.

One that simply states:
“Hold the space and sit with the shame.”

DISORGANISED

By Anonymous

Imagine your eight or nine-year-old self. One night, you go to sleep in their bed as usual, only to have a nightmare. Finally, after the throes of it all, you wake up in a strange environment. Or at least strange to you.

The first thing that's apparent is your body. This is not a nine-year-old's body. What the hell? It's so large. It's so beaten up. Everything hurts, why does getting out of bed hurt? How did I get here? Where even is here?

Someone's in the next room of this building, someone about thirty-years-old who greets you with a smile and your name when you open the door into the kitchen. You don't know how you know it's the door to the kitchen, or that the room across from you is the bathroom, or that you are two stories up, but the second you realise that the idea disappears. The name they said: it sounds familiar, it is your name. You try to smile back to them, but you have never seen this person before in your life despite the sense of familiarity. Maybe an uncle you met when you were just a kid. You don't remember having an Asian uncle.

An alarm goes off in the room where you woke up. Walking back to turn it off, you notice a wardrobe mirror and stop to look at yourself.

This is not you. This is not you at all. You are old, frail, unhealthy. Then there's the horror of recognition. Oh god. There's a scar from where you fell out of a tree when you were seven. Those are your teeth, your nails, your own nine-year-old eyes staring back at you from bloodshot orbits that don't make any sense. This is you. But it can't be you. That's impossible. You stand staring at your reflection until your housemate

comes by to tell you that your alarm has been going off for 15 minutes and to ask you if you could turn it off. You practically run away from the mirror to turn off the alarm.

This is all just a dream. A horrible, no good, terrible dream. You're going to wake up from it in a bit. You explore the house. It's terrible. How old are you? How did you end up here? What did you mess up that lead you here? You would've killed yourself if you knew you'd turn out like this.

There was a computer in your bedroom. There's a password. You type in the one you first started using in twelfth grade, despite the fact that you haven't done that yet, you've just started grade 5. You remember your Dad wanting to beat the shit out of you for the time you accidentally wiped the household computer trying to log in without the password. But you don't even remember when that is. Can't think about it now, I've got to have answers.

Desktop. Nearly a hundred crowded icons and pinned executables. A browser, something you don't recognise, and Steam. You recognise that one. You start with the browser. Going through the dozen or so bookmarks give you more info. How the heck… why is old you, or I guess you, so disorganised?

" How old are you? How did you end up here? What did you mess up that lead you here? "

You get your name, your job. There's a number for your workplace. You hesitantly call. You've never used a phone before so you hang up the first time by accidentally touching your earlobe against the hangup button. It picks up the second ring. The secretary tells you that your client is about to angrily leave.

That client. You remember their name, age, education, symptomology and history. You remember that you had an appointment with them at nine o'clock this morning, and it's now thirty past.

"Fuck."

You didn't say that. Your lips moved, your lungs squeezed, and your throat tensed, but you didn't say that. The body you said that. "I've gotta go." It says.

You are lurched upwards. Your clothes are ripped off by your body and you feel like a series of photos you took by accident on a disposable camera when you were seven, dancing in the pouring rain, finger over the shutter. It's freezing hot and cold at the same time. Mum is telling you to come inside at once, how dare you have done whatever infraction it is that you can't have possibly had a part in. She's dragging you to the car, your hair still soaking wet. You're in the front seat. You're wearing business suit for some reason. That's not right. I remember being in the back seat. I was barely tall enough to see out the windows. Because I was malnourished and didn't have appetite because it's hard to eat anything when people are constantly screaming at you and telling you they're giving you away to an orphanage for being such a little shit and it's clear that you're the source of all of their problems. And you're begging them, pleading with them, telling them you'll be a good boy, you'll do whatever, please don't throw me away, and your mother looks down at you with the same mixture of contempt and disgust that the girl you were in love with 10 years later gave you as she left after she fucked you, probably just to make you go away, as a "parting gift" in her mind.

You arrive at work. You're forty minutes late. Your hair is still wet from the shower you took. You don't know how to park the car, and someone honks at you for blocking the entryway.



People always told you that driving a car in video games was nothing like the real thing. But no.

It was precisely like a video game. You park perfectly, reverse parallel, first try. Man, I always knew I could have done anything at twelve. Being good at things was so easy. Whatever you put your mind to you weren't just the best at compared to your peers, but you were better than even practiced adults, even in complicated stuff like music. Apparently it wasn't normal to be able to play by ear.

What the fuck happened to them? Are they dead? I can't find their eyes in the mirror anymore. Time to go into the office. Your client is not happy, but you apologise profusely, and they're mostly just seeking a design document. You'll write it for free this evening so that you don't have to give them a bunch of your time for free as compensation. You know what they're looking for anyway.

You head down the hall and open the door to your bedroom. It's dark, and for a moment you think it's the bedroom you went to sleep in all those years ago. Or last night.

What happened to you?

I don't know.

What happened to you?

I don't know either.

I think we grew up.

I don't know how I grew up into you.

I would have-
-would have killed myself. I remember.

The only reason we were able to make it through everything, to keep going, was because one day it was going to end. It was going to be better. I was so sure of it.

I'm sorry, kid.

You're not sorry. In fact, you hate them for them not using their gifts while they were young and fresh to think up some better plan that wouldn't put you in this sweet hell you've ended up in. Forty thousand in debt, ramen twice a day, no chance at marriage, and borderline alcoholism. Pretty impressive for thirty, even in this day and age. Or twenty-five. Who knows, nothing changed, you just got older, you doubt that anything got better.

Let's go outside.

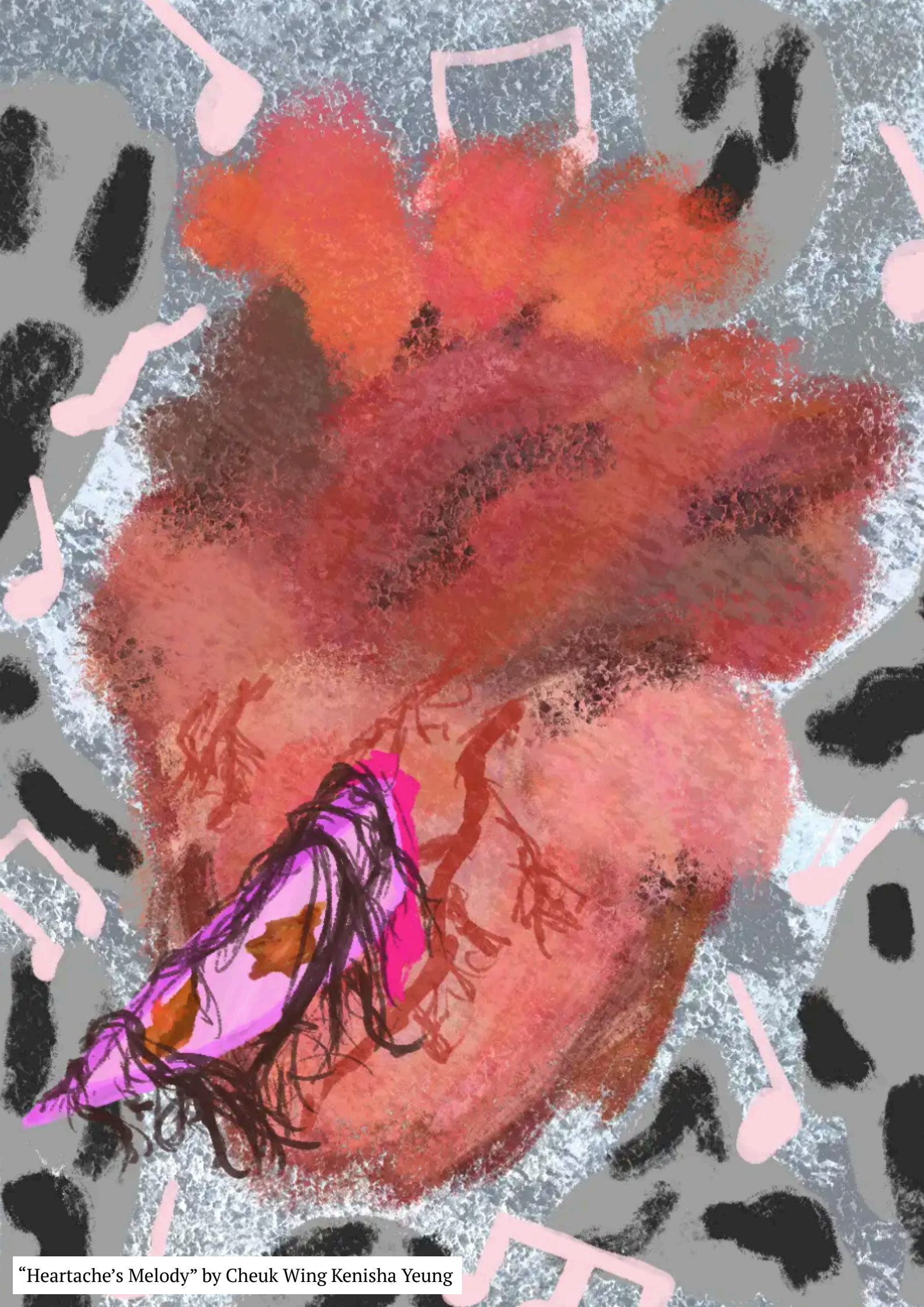
I'm not going outside.

This time, it's you that takes your clothes off.
You lock the door and pull all the sheets off your bed and the mattress. You stuff them beneath the bed, then pull the mattress in after you, sealing yourself in. It's cool down here. It's dark. Nothing can hurt you. You are safe. For the first time in your life you have your own space where you are certain no one can hurt you.

Mum's arm breaches through the sheets, grasping at the air, finally getting hold of your ankle.

That's right. She said no pillow forts.

The screaming goes on for a long time.



“Heartache’s Melody” by Cheuk Wing Kenisha Yeung

Re: Dear McCracken

Remember back when we could smoke on airplanes,
the way the air split into little grey cells—
the air steward's plain livery was a greyscale triband
her eyes and hair were a jet black called her blackbird
she crooked an index finger to me and you cried.

one day while throwing a blonde tantrum
you scuffed my favourite shoes I shouted at you
and you cried. *God, you haven't grown up at all.*

all the time between the old days and the new hours
daylight savings & jetlag throw up signs of distraction.
The paint coat is chipped under your left eye and right-wing
winking from the captain's window with the stars and stripes.

I cried when they sang to the nation. And in facing visions of the
anatomic reality of our mid-air collisions, you are so much
braver than I

Trolley into the terminal beside you I hover over the yellow line
I lie in a cramped teal office chair and as a banker, I lie still.
How do you live this liminal space ship all gone code sea-blue.
A nurse walks in. *Is it operable?*

When I grew old, done, and hairy wearing only skid marks
I saw you too right to the pitch-side of me, the lottery machine
crook of your finger was wrinkled you had grown up now
you had given up smoking.

By P.E. Scott

Requiem for a Broken Heart

By Edan Zhao

Unshaved stubble lined his jaw, and his untucked shirt hung in tired wrinkles, alike to the bags that fell from his sleep-deprived eyes. Kai was on edge. Today, he turned 18. Today, the web of destiny would be unravelled. He was on edge as he walked to class. As he ate. As he watched his teacher's mouth utter seemingly inaudible phrases.

“In this piece of literature... the significance of the self-fulfilling prophecy...”

Class... after class... after class. Then lunch came.

"Jay! Happy 18th man, what did it turn out to be?"

"Says I've got 63 years. Something to do with lung cancer..."

"Makes sense. Like father like son, right? Smoking twenty cigs a day." Jay punched Kai's arm with a chuckle.

"What about you?"

"Huh?" Kai smiled superficially. Jay raised his eyebrow.

“Your prediction.”

Kai’s heart skipped a beat.

“Haven’t checked.” Kai shrugged.

His smile faded as he turned away from Jay. Kai’s heart raced at an improbable rate, almost like it was trying to escape his chest. The truth was the prediction was all he had on his mind for the past year. He spent hours, analysing his past and attempting to foresee his own prediction. Will I live till I’m old? Die peacefully? Yet despite his yearning desire to reveal his fate, he knew he simply couldn’t handle it alone.

***

There she stood, patiently waiting for his arrival. In the afternoon breeze that swept its way through the city’s metropolis, her dark hair ever so slightly danced, alike to the flickering flames of a soft campfire. Rei commanded one of those rare presences that was both comforting yet intimidating at the same time. Kai never seemed to figure out when exactly his obsession with her began. Either way, his heart always seemed to flutter like a butterfly’s wings simply at the sight of her.

She spotted him amongst the crowd and ran over, beaming. She had one of those rare smiles which were dangerously contagious.

“Happy birthday, you absolute fossil.” Rei laughed. Kai tried his best to laugh authentically, his hands fidgeting in the pockets of his blazer. She glanced over and grabbed his shivering hands, looking

concerningly at him.

Why did she grab my hands like that?

“You haven’t checked, have you?” she said softly. Kai, beginning to sweat, shook his head.

“I wanted to do it with you,” he replied. Rei looked at him, a smirk on her stupid, pretty face. She gripped his hand tightly and nodded. Reluctantly, Kai brought out his phone. Sweat fell upon the screen as he tried to wipe it away with his blazer sleeves. His face – crimson as a stop sign – glanced over at Rei. He closed his eyes, took a single deep breath, and opened the app.

Eight words sat on the screen.

(“) The end is near. Stabbed in the heart.

Kai read each word painfully. One by one. His face began to crumple. His breathing became rapid and shallow. The oxygen around him disappeared. A tingling sensation infested his head, and at once, vertigo struck him like a piercing bolt of lightning. Off balance, Kai collapsed, his countenance lay in a state of absolute horror and disbelief. The worst possible outcome he could have imagined had become his reality. And that wasn’t something he was ready to accept.

In the distance, he could make out a faint tune. It had an eerie sense to it; perhaps it was the melody of death. Voices harmonised softly, then all at once went silent as quickly as they began.

Did you hear that?

Kai’s mind raced. *Stabbed in the heart. Was someone after him?*



How long exactly did he have left? Perhaps the perpetrator was beside him right now. He glanced frantically at the hundreds of potential killers that passed him by.

He’s got a funny looking jacket. She has two different socks on: signs of a psychopath? Why is he looking at me? Why… why is everyone looking at me?

Softly, the enigmatic melody resumed somewhere beyond the horizon. It seemed to emanate from every direction, like a haunting yet intriguing aura.

There was a single thought on his mind: death. He wasn’t ready for it; he thought of the things he wished he could’ve done in the past. All his missed opportunities, failures, and embarrassments seemed to consume his thoughts. He didn’t have the time to say goodbye to everyone he loved. His parents. His friends. Rei.

Rei…

His greatest accomplishment in life: becoming her friend. She was always there for him. Even now, tears streamed down her

face as she desperately cried out his name, hoping for any reaction from his horrified face. It was insanely agonising, the fact that Kai knew he could spend every day with her, yet in the end, she'd always be just out of reach. Like an exquisite watch, sitting on display each day waiting for a better man to take it home. No matter how many loans he took, he felt as if he'd never match its worth.

Her worth.

As he contemplated death, there was but one other thing that dominated his thoughts. Regret. He knew the past was unchangeable. But first came the banishment of his regret. And it began and ended with her.

And it began and ended with her.

How many years had he waited for this moment? His heart and his mind had fought often on the topic of confession. She was his best friend. But no, he admired her more than that. His infatuation had translated to another form of… what do you call it?

Love.

He loved her. He felt a deep connection with her, rooted like a great elm into his brain. He needed her. Kai often feared what life would be like in the absence of Rei – the absence of love. That fear is what fuelled the cruel dilemma which kept his confession sealed for so many years. Confess, and he risked rejection. Refuse to confess, and he tortured himself everyday with the knowledge that they would never fall in love. Either way, it ended with heartbreak. A Catch-22.

He began to hear the ominous theme crescendo; this time a harrowing choir joined the orchestra. Its volume was terribly loud – Kai began to block his ears in agony.

"Can you hear that?" Confused, Rei shook her head and placed her hand on his in an attempt at comfort. At the instant of her touch, a piercing pain struck Kai's heart. He cried in agony and pulled his hand away. Rei's expression was unfathomable. She was completely overwhelmed by feelings of concern and complete shock. Kai began to cry. Shamelessly, torrents of tears flowed from his eyes to the ground. He proceeded to tell Rei absolutely everything.

***

The song had died down. Its climax seemingly over. The harmonising voices had gone silent, and all that remained was the percussion.

As he spoke the last words on his mind, his whole face was in a flush, and his heart seemed to beat in sequence with the drums of the song.

Beat.

"Kai. I love you. I really do."

Beat.

"But…"

Beat.

"I'm not sure if I love you in that way."

Beat.

"I'm… Sorry…"

Kai scoffed. Perhaps in denial. Perhaps in anger. Perhaps in pure and utter regret. But he couldn't tell which feeling hurt the most. His heart hammered relentlessly, irregularly,

against his chest; as despair seemed to consume all the light left in Kai's vision, he soon began to see nothing but a colourless void.

"Kai!"

***

You always knew, didn't you?

Beat.

"Who are you?"

Beat.

I'm the part of you that you've spent your whole life protecting. And ironically enough, it is now you who has broken me down. But you knew that already. Why ask?

Beat.

"I wasn't sure whether you were gone yet or not. I clung on to the false hope you weren't."

Beat.

Ah, but I'm still here. But only for a little while longer. Because you refuse to let go.

Beat.

What if that's not a choice I can make."

Beat.

Then perhaps it is your destiny. After all, I was prophesised to leave at this very minute, no?

Beat.

"But I want to live! I want to love! I need you. Please don't go. Please."

Beat.

You still don't seem to understand.

Beat.

"I…"

Beat.

I was made to be broken. That is my purpose. Why I was created. Why I was nurtured and cared for. Raised and fed. Like a pig raised for slaughter. For the day of harvest… has finally arrived.

Silence.

"But Rei…"

Rei!

***

"He seems to be completely healthy." As Kai awoke to the horrified faces of his parents, he failed to recognize who they were. He was now a heartless soul, incapable of love. And where there was no love, there was no life.

He could hear the tune again, yet the percussion was gone now.

All that remained was the requiem.

by Liana Wilson


by Liana Wilson


by Liana Wilson

Raspberry is the Collective Noun for Joy

by Naomi Harding-Smith

Everyone experiences highs and lows in life. Since I was diagnosed with depression seven years ago, my highs are always followed by prolonged lows. It becomes hard to know that I will experience joy again when I am in a period of lows. However, I've found that, by carefully curating my joys, I can create a resistance to the all-consuming nature of my lows and persist. The joys I have the most success with are small joys.

I suppose I ought to define my understanding of joy. When examining the psychology of joy, the majority of studies I found have been published in the 21st century; thus, our scientific understanding of joy—its qualities, impacts, and origins—is relatively new and still evolving. However, just because we've only recently started to delve into what joy really is doesn't mean that we don't understand the basic fundamentals of it.

Joy is different from happiness: a statement that has been echoed in many studies. Joy is a deeply contradictory emotion, for it is both slow and fleeting, deep and spontaneous, and can occur even in moments of sorrow. It doesn't have a defined source—even within a single person—and those sources can be both important and insignificant. And yet, despite its nebulous existence, it cannot be denied that joy is a deeply profound and enduring emotion.

So, when I talk about my deeply cherished small joys, I'm talking about things that aren't the first thing to come to mind when someone asks you what makes you happy. My small joys are a type of serene joy, something quiet that makes you feel like your soul has been illuminated. I hope you have experienced them too. It's that moment when you're just sitting with your friends after a long day, or when you're sipping a hot drink in the cold, or when you stare up at sunlight filtering through leaves. It's a small, yet intense, moment of peace that is stark in appearance but with an enduring effect. Even so, I know from experience that joy can be incredibly hard to foster—or even recognise—when you've experienced

extended periods of hardship, sorrow, illness, or pain, and the world seems like it's out to get you.

I cannot pinpoint when the slow, gradual decline of my health began; all I know is that it started more than seven years ago. What I do know is that, amongst a range of other issues, I was diagnosed with a low allergy to egg whites and an intolerance to fructose four years ago when I was seventeen. At the time, this food-based indignity was the final and obvious proof of the universe's bias against me. Why? Because some of the small joys I had begun to cultivate included marshmallows—famously containing egg whites—and fruit—virtually synonymous with fructose. Naturally, I complained endlessly to my friends, who only laughed at my misery; I got better at laughing at it as well.

I found it difficult—and still do—not to be a slave to my vices and binge on marshmallows and fruit (to my parents' great despair, as their concerns for my health and well-being are far more conscientious than my own). After all, marshmallows and fruit remind me of happy times when my family went camping as a child, and indulging in my forbidden food also allows me to revisit those moments of joy in my youth.

However, all is not lost to me! For, although all fruits contain fructose, some fruits are more potently infused than others. The apple, for example, contains such a comparatively high level of fructose that it is not much of an exaggeration to call it my personal poison. The raspberry, on the other hand, is considered a low-fructose fruit that I can consume in small enough portions to be safe. So, thankfully, while some of my



small joys were effectively robbed from me, I was able to cling to a few (in small enough doses).

Another small joy of mine is collecting collective nouns from the wonderful world of words; they are a joy to remember, to collect, to use, and I'd like to share some with you. A group of owls is a parliament, whereas a group of ostriches is a wobble. You can have a business of ferrets, or a flamboyance of flamingoes. My favourite collective nouns belong to Australian animals, with collective nouns like a wisdom of wombats, a paddle of platypuses, and a cackle of cockatoos being only a few I hold close to my heart. The reasonable ridiculousness found in collective nouns is endlessly entertaining to me, and the joy from learning new ones re-ignites every time I share it with a friend. And now, as I muse at one o'clock on a Friday morning, I discover that the word raspberry is also a collective noun.

Much like my small joys, that slowly fuse together to create a slightly more tolerable world, a raspberry is built from multiple little fruits called drupelets. More commonly known as 'stone fruit', a drupe has a fleshy exterior that surrounds a seed with a hard surface (the

(the ‘stone’). Every one of my small joys are like drupes; their fleshy outer layer is full of short-term wonder, which leaves behind a seed I can cultivate in order to revel in the same small joy again.

I was diagnosed with depression seven years ago, in the ninth grade of school. I grew tired of school, and life, and stopped taking care of myself. Furthermore, (and this is something I did not mention earlier, but is still quite relevant to my epiphany about raspberries and joy), the rest of my high school life also took a downward turn, especially during the last two years in which, while I was not homeschooled, I learned my school's curriculum from home.

My sleep was impacted—and is still impacted to this day, allowing me to muse about my life in the small hours of the morning—and I started to live a nocturnal life that greatly reduced my ability to see my friends and even my family. It was in those years when I turned to my small joys as a crutch, for there was no way for me to even conceptualise what a larger joy might feel like.

But I clung to my small joys—to marshmallows, and collective nouns, and raspberries—and learned again, through them, what it meant to feel happy.

My ongoing experience with depression—and everything that came after—taught me a lot about being alive, and I can only hope that, while reading this little story of mine, I’ve helped some of you with your journey through life and its struggles, even if that’s just by feeling seen. Because, even though life can be hard when you haven’t felt joy in a long time, that doesn’t mean you'll never feel joy again. Joy is something you can cultivate—something that you can actively seek out—and I can only hope that everyone does so, for no one deserves a life without joy.

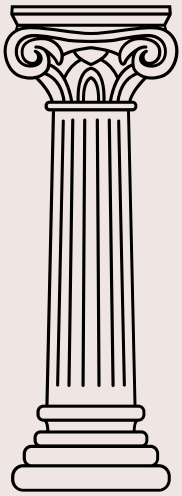
So, I have another collective noun to add to my horde, and hopefully yours too; a mob of echidnas is a parade, a swarm of butterflies a kaleidoscope, and a singular raspberry contains all the small joys of the world—ripe for the taking, so long as you reach out and find them.

Naomi Harding-Smith

Naomi Harding-Smith (no pronouns) is an agender, aromantic-asexual writer with Functional Neurological Disorder, born and raised in Meanjin (Brisbane), whose writing focuses on queer and disabled themes. Currently, Naomi's favourite genres to write in are dystopia, utopia, sci-fi, and creative non-fiction.



The Gay Symposium



by Caroline Hankey

When the man sat down beside them, all but one of the drinking fellows squeaked back in their chairs. From the crowd, a lithe young man clad in jeans, a heavy jacket and with a hardcore black leather mask on his face had sat down at their pub table. It was obvious the drinkers were uncomfortable but the peculiar arrival didn't pay much mind as he crossed his legs and made himself comfortable.

Only one fellow was left unfazed. The theatrical and precocious dandy of the group, Tarn, lifted his glass high then cocked it slightly downwards, like a Roman emperor's thumbs-down verdict.

'Hold on Davey. Charlie. Parker,' Tarn commanded. 'You hapless twits. Stay put. We've not finished our drinks and you'll be damned sorry looking for another table for four in this place.'

The trio of escapees stopped to consider before inching their seats back to the table. They looked between one another warily, then to their friend Tarn, and then finally with disdain to the strange muzzled boy. There was a long pause before the heavyset and hardworking David broke the silence.

'Tarn, mate,' he spoke with friendly concern.

'Mm, yes?' Tarn slung his red feather boa over a shoulder with his cocktail-free hand.

'You remember when we said something like, yeah mate we'd be happy to try this place, because you said it's not too gay? No drag queens or weird fetishy shit, remember?'

'All too well, Davey.'

'Well, what's this?' He gestured to the stranger. 'What's gone and happened?'

'Something awfully gay from the looks of it,' Tarn conceded.

The trio nodded and Tarn did too. His friends were modest in their queerness and he was sympathetic to their plight. However, he also felt they ought to be hospitable to their new guest, from who he sensed no ill will. He also fancied him to be quite handsome with his high cheekbones and tired but sharp eyes. He placed a glass in front of the boy and poured him water while everyone watched suspiciously from behind their raised pints. Though the boy's his face was only discernible from the tip of his slender nose upwards, his eyes beamed a sleepy smile that looked at odds with the metal and black bondage tight around his face.

'I don't think he can drink that,' commented Parker.

Charlie chimed in, 'Maybe with a straw? Usually those masks have a hole…'

‘You’re just happy, aren’t you?’ Tarn softly cheered the anonymous visitor, who was becoming more pleased by the second, crossing his hands in his lap and lowering his shoulders. Then, to the great horror and betrayal of his comrades who had pleaded to him just hours ago for a nice normal night out, Tarn reached over and petted the boy, ruffling his wild fluffy hair thoroughly and enthusiastically.

David threw up his hands. ‘Fuck. There he goes.’

Parker covered his eyes. ‘That’s gross man, come on. Who the fuck knows where that guy’s been?’

Charlie crumpled up his napkin and threw it on the table. ‘I could have died happily having not seen two people do this. You just took that away from me.’

The leather clad weirdo shook himself excitedly and the buckles along his jaw clinked. Then he shot a look at Charlie who shivered in disgust.

Tarn watched as his friends began mumbling to each other, gathering their things and preparing to leave. The discord rubbed him terribly.

Parker said, ‘Well Tarn, it was nice seeing you, but it’s not really our scene,’ and the dissenters rose to leave.

‘Yeah, I’ve gotta be on site in the morning.’ David shook himself off, eager to rid himself of this occasion.

Tarn felt a twang in his chest. Something had to be said, in the name of love and justice.

‘Listen up, you hapless—hang on. I’ve already used that one.’ His mind raced, one hand still on his loyal hound.

He then stuck the cocktail umbrella from his drink in the corner of his mouth and his voice became militant. ‘Alright, you spineless wimps. Let’s get real. You think you know shit about life in the real world?’

The odd performance managed to re-engage his friends back into their seats.

David began his retort. ‘Respectfully, Tarn, I am in touch with the real world. I especially don’t hide from it with a creepy fetish mask.’

Charlie and Parker nodded concurrently, supporting David’s side in the debate. Tarn smiled patiently, fiddling with his umbrella.

David carried on, his voice the kind of blue-collar honest that Australian politicians spend their lives trying to imitate.

‘Now, even if I had such proclivities,’ he said, gesturing to the unwelcome guest, ‘I wouldn’t stick them in people’s faces and go around forcing others to participate. This isn’t an orgy. I’m trying to have a beer. If he was sitting alone at a table, nobody would come near him, so he has to come invade our space. It’s selfish.’

He rested his case and swigged his pint. Parker crossed his arms and nodded harder. Charlie saw what Parker was doing and copied him.

The masked boy looked over to Tarn with confusion in his eyes that stirred contempt among the prosecution. Tarn plucked the umbrella from his mouth and stuck it into the mess of soft brown hair on the boy’s head before re-addressing the table.

‘Gentlemen. David. I know you speak from the heart when you raise concerns like these. I’m also sure you all know that few people can be as critical about queer behaviour as I, so I implore you to recall my own credentials in homophobia as I make my case here.’

LET’S GET REAL.

The friends listened quietly and attentively. The strength and longevity of this group of pals had always hinged on their capacity for fair and honest discussion.

‘Now David. You used words like force and invade in the argument against our guest here, but is that really the case? Does taking an empty seat in a pub—etymologically: the public house—qualify as invasion? Moreover, was I forced, misled or coerced into giving our new friend here a rigorous pat on the head?’

‘No, Tarn, you weren’t,’ said David. ‘However, you may have noticed he’s wearing BDSM gear in public. His presence and intentions are clearly sexual. That’s encroaching.’

‘You say that as if he were exposing himself. Think about it David, you’re making the same argument misogynists make when they say a girl was asking for it because she was wearing a short skirt. Slippery slope, my friend. By your logic, anyone out tonight looking for love is encroaching on your comfort with their unsavoury intentions.’

David nodded and sat still, trying to formulate a response. Tarn stayed persistent.

‘Yes, but it’s not logic you’re operating on here, David. You can stop thinking so hard, I’m going to be didactic for you now. You’re scared because you don’t understand why somebody would wear that mask. You feel for this boy, trapped and silenced as he is, but you can’t reconcile that with his apparent choice in the matter. Your empathy short circuited. Who would be sick enough to willingly subjugate themselves like this? It’s a dark part of your mind, David. You’re afraid to go there. How’s being a company tradie any different? On the outside you’re a strong and independent man, but how much of yourself have you given away that we can’t see? More than you know? Are you even sure you belong to yourself?’

Tarn left the thought hanging, not immediately sure if it had landed right. David held his empty pint in one hand and his forehead sank into the other. The masked boy had found a straw and was trying to jam it up under the leather of his mask so he could drink the water Tarn poured for him. Charlie and Parker looked dismayed.

‘That was a bit too real, man,’ said Charlie.

‘Maybe.’ Tarn chuckled.

David stayed silent. His face remained in his hand, masking his thoughts.

‘Is he okay? Boys’ night doesn’t usually get this heavy,’ said Parker.

‘No, Parker, it doesn’t, but this is what the next bit is for. Everyone, David, listen good. Consider our new friend here. He’s been polite, receptive, and arguably adorable, but I won’t be arguing taste with you fools. This boy deserves a base amount of recognition and respect. Tipsy as we are, we ought to be spirited and generous with these things. Each of you, go ahead.’

Charlie went first. ‘Uh, sorry we were mean. You’re not scary or gross.’

The muzzled boy nodded.

‘Yeah, sorry man,’ said Parker. ‘And honestly, the mask is kinda sick. It’s like Mad Max, or Tokyo Ghoul.’

David didn’t apologise. Instead, he rose and made his way around the table to behind the boy. He put his hand on the boy’s head and gave him and good hard pat, much to everyone’s delight.


by Liana Wilson

we hope you enjoyed:

L.A. Neal – “Ignorance Will Not Save Us”

L.A. Neal is an Australian writer and aspiring editor with a deep fascination for writing poetry (but not reading it). They hope you will enjoy 'Privilege Will Not Save Us' as much as they enjoyed the puzzle of putting together a pantoum.

Tyra Arthur – “Ode for the Morning”

Tyra is a writer and mathematics student who enjoys working across poetic forms, with a particular interest in the reinterpretation of poetic tradition and mythology.

Callum Ede – “Permission Slip Withdrawal”

Cal Ede is a spoken word poet and educator with a passion to inspire young people with audacious creativity. He writes thought-provoking poetry with an emphasis on rhythm and alliteration. Since publication in Writing Queensland, Cal hopes to share more raw experiences with a positive message for all to hear.

P.E. Scott – “Re: Dear McCracken”

P.E. Scott is the pen-name of Euan Scott a Meeanjin-based writer and recent graduate of a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Creative Writing and History. Euan's work is often experimental, integrating subversive metaphors, an inadherence to form, and rambunctious neologisms throughout, whether poetry or prose.

Edan Zhao – “A Requiem for Heartbreak”

“Heya, I'm Edan, forced to be a compsci student, born to be a creative. I love filmmaking, yapping in blogs, and of course writing screenplays and short stories.”

Caroline Hankey – “The Gay Symposium”

Caroline Hankey is a sappy hack writer, fond of writing personal letters and absurd queer romantic fiction. Recently moved from Tasmania and studying at UQ, she's doing her best to keep it all together.

Lewis Hastie – “My Endless Days”

“I'm interested in poetry's ability to distill entire swathes of life; the months, years, into a kind of potent concentrate. Like a punch to the stomach or a lover's caress. They are the ultimate photograph, your poetry is your life. But also, the architecture of a poem is yours to manipulate. You can lie - spit your heart out, but poems are poems; they become a kind of truth in their own right, and reveal things invisible to you at the moment of writing them. “


by Liana Wilson



by Lewis Hastie

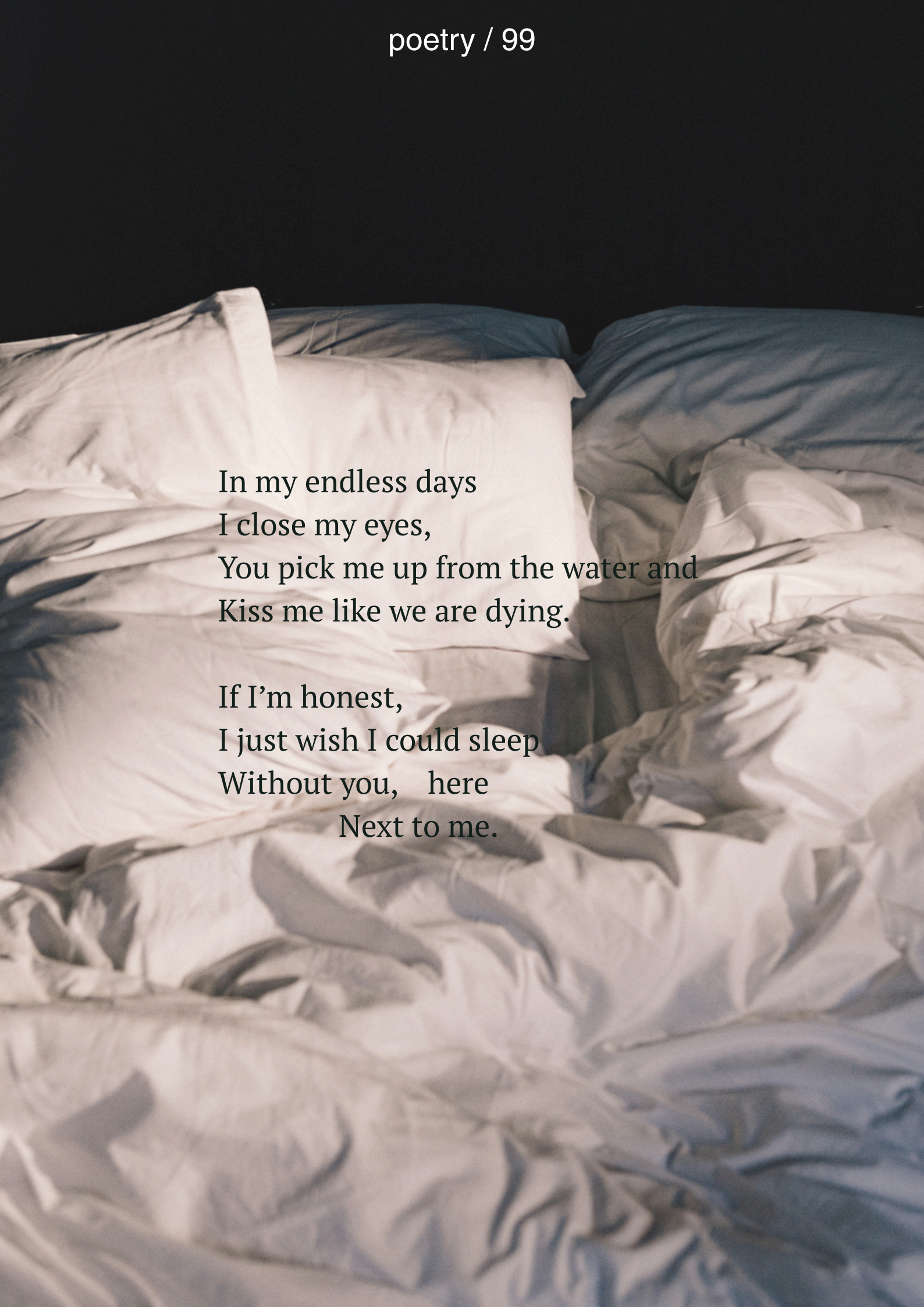
The Greeks said being honest is dangerous, but when have they ever been right.

I'm sick, rolling and dizzy from all this web weaving,
Pushing out new things like so many children.
Projecting my dreams until there's nothing left to cast.
What I want is to tell it how it is,
How I feel it move through me. The seconds, the hours, the days.
A phantom invisible flame,
Burning the wick from all ends.
It doesn't matter.
I'm tired of all these images.
Just tell it how it is.

I see it moving.
Feel it - slithering, wrapping, slow but sure.
I'm good at pessimism, have a psychic sight for mortality.
It's slipping out the door while we're busy in the kitchen.
Here, I made you cookies, here
It's Sunday, here, I'm older now and
Can you tell I'm less beautiful?

Tell me you've had enough of this
Constant pushing apart
Tell me
Time is just the way light moves
Outrun it, and
We can wade forever.

On trains and dreams and watching my feet rhythmic like machines
In my endless days
I move in two worlds. One here
One nowhere – that great lake,
Lazy and open
In my endless days
I lay on the dancing water
Soft, rippling with the breeze.
I'm floating
Trying to keep my legs on the surface
The sun is red with love and setting.



In my endless days
I close my eyes,
You pick me up from the water and
Kiss me like we are dying.

If I'm honest,
I just wish I could sleep
Without you, here
Next to me.


by Liana Wilson

what we believe

afterword is built on the idea that writing gets better when we let other people into it.

every piece in this issue has passed through the hands of student writers, editors, readers and designers – not to make every voice sound the same, but to help each one sound more like itself.

peer, not prescription.

our editing process is collaborative. we ask questions, make suggestions, leave too many comments in the margins and occassionally argue over commas. the final word, however, always belongs to the writer.

room to experiment.

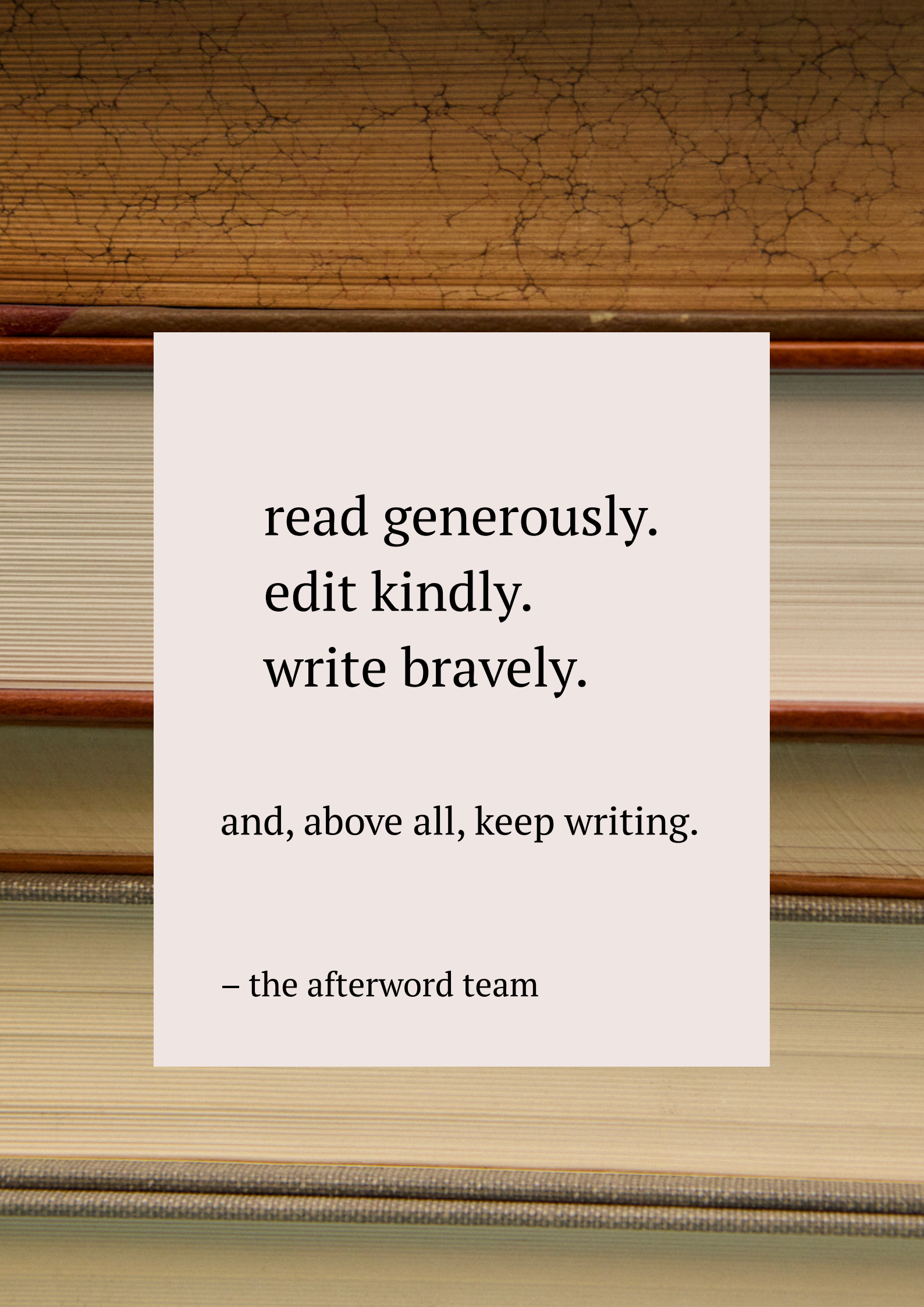
we like work that takes risks. work that is strange, unfinished around the edges, difficult to categorise, or doing something we haven't quite seen before. there is no single way to write something worth reading.

writing belongs here.

you don't need a publication history, a perfect draft, or an elaborate literary vocabulary to submit to afterword. you just need something you want someone else to read.

made by students, for students.

afterword is edited, designed, and put together by students. we believe that student writing deserves to be taken seriously – without having to take itself seriously all the time.



read generously.
edit kindly.
write bravely.

and, above all, keep writing.

– the afterword team



issue one – 2026