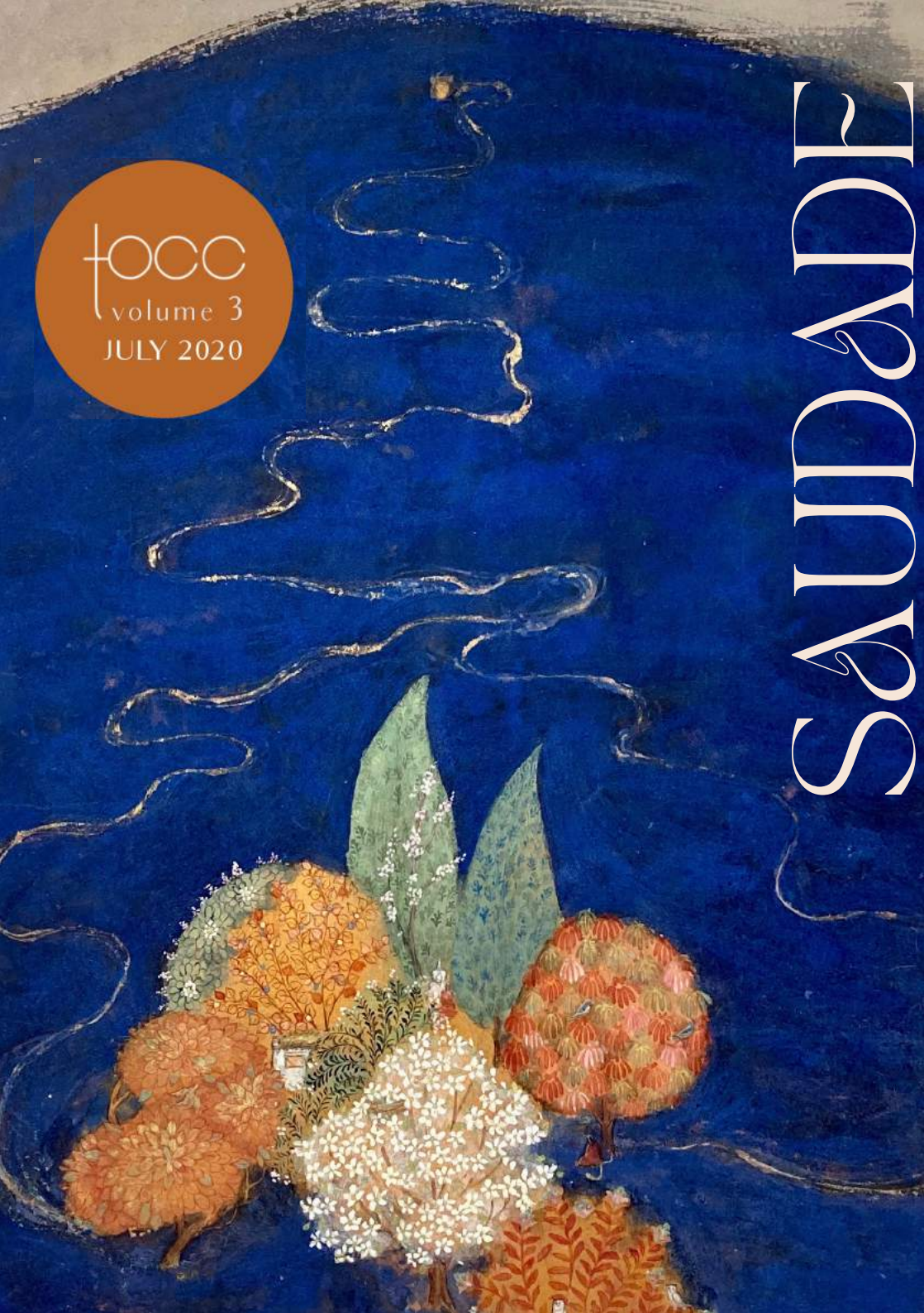


SAUNDY

toCC
volume 3
JULY 2020



“The feelings that hurt most, the emotions that sting most, are those that are absurd — the longing for impossible things, precisely because they are impossible; nostalgia for what never was; the desire for what could have been; regret over not being someone else; dissatisfaction with the world’s existence. All these half-tones of the soul’s consciousness create in us a painful landscape, an eternal sunset of what we are.”

— Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*



A Note from the Editors

Welcome to the third volume of The Open Culture Collective.

Despite being caught up in a pursuit for normalcy in the early days of 2021, we found ourselves seeking old comforts and longing for the discreet vigours of creative pursuits. With a second wave approaching at frightening pace, boundaries closing once again, and restrictions on movement and travel, we were not alone in our yearning for times gone by. Writers, artists and photographers, from places we dream to visit in better times and those a stone's throw away, have shown us how connected the human experience can be.

We thought our theme for this issue would be the perfect expression of our collective emotional states. "Saudade", a profound melancholic longing for something that may never be had again. It has allowed us to explore writing and art in a profound and personal level thus far uncharted, and presents an honest and veracious chronicle of our mutual vulnerabilities.

If there's a place you miss, a love you have lost, or a person no longer with you, we hope you find comfort in these pages — for they contain all the sensations that have equally tormented and brought joy to those of us like you.

Thank you for your continued trust and encouragement. We hope you are safe and sound wherever you are in the world.

Jasmítha Arvind

Rashmí S

Meghna Anil Nair



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A Second Chance

PRERNA CHATTERJEE

The dream had been of balconies. The first one was wide with an armchair on one side and a coffee table next to it. The cemented pillars supported marble slabs, on which pots of hibiscus, Christ plant and petunia stood. The other part of the balcony was shaded by buoyant bougainvillea, pale orange in colour. Winter sun, slanted and waning poured in through the leaves. The smell of peppermint tea blended with the longing for a butterfly biscuit, crunchy on the edges and sugary towards the middle. Tarun always returned with a dozen, wrapped in loose newspaper on his way back. The tea stall, by his office sold the best butterfly biscuits in town.

The next balcony bore traces of neglect. It was a narrow dumping space for unwanted items. A bicycle with flat tyres, discolored gas cylinder, ladder with a cracked step and heaps of plastic bags. Worn out clothes hung from the lines. A little boy appeared, dressed in a cardboard box. He was followed by a girl wearing a blue vest. An upturned wok rested on her tiny head. She carried ladles in both hands. When the boy pushed her around, she resisted with ladles. The smell of milk tea blended with the longing for plain Marie biscuits that became soggy when dipped in milk tea. Brother always stealthily buttered his Marie biscuits before dipping them. Mother wondered how she ran out of butter so soon into the month.

The last balcony was more of a corridor with classrooms lined on one side. The ledge on the other side was crowded with plants, too dry to flower. Half done posters hung from the edge - colours still raw and slogans, incomplete. The winter sun was young and snug on the ledge, much like the two girls who held each other. They leaned against the wall, shoulders stiff and palms sweaty. The smell of unsweetened black tea, reminded her of cheap cigarettes. Mishka always insisted that they shared cigarettes and tea, stealing kisses in between.

She woke up with a start to the sound of the ECG machine beeping. The hospital room resembled a scene from some war flick. Nurses rushed in and out with patients, gasping for breath. They fixed oxygen masks and ran channels in the hands of the patients. She listened to her own breath. It had steadied over the past few hours. Her chest did not feel like it would burst open. Maybe she had some amount of life left in her. Maybe she could tell mother where all the butter in the world went. Maybe she would feel the slanting rays of winter sun on her eyelids one more time. Maybe, she could confide in Tarun about Mishka, once this got over. Maybe her kisses would finally be written on the right side of history. But right now, she felt thirsty for a cup of tea.

Perna Chatterjee is a full-time editor at a publishing house and a part-time freelance writer based in India. When not reading or editing, she can cook up fiction or fudge brownies. Twitter: @PernaChatterji



"MOONLIT NIGHT"

Japanese mineral powder paints

Hironobu Naito



Hironobu Naito was born in Japan in 1962. He became very attracted to the world of blue and light. Japanese mineral powder paints and metals give a very deep and unique blue color. The work he produces gives deep emotions.

Graduation

TUUR VERHEYDE

This is the story
Of my student struggles
And the moment I attained
Graduation:

The romance
Is what did me in.
Not actual romance,
Not anything that exciting,
Just the romance in the idea
Of being a student poet
In a town overflowing
With energy and intellect.

Oh, the people I would meet,
Oh, the talks I would have,
Oh, the things I would do
And write.
Academia's fragrance lush
Like a cornucopia of promise.

I was so seduced by her,
And the idea of student life
Because they promised to bully me
With pleasure and plenty
Into becoming someone better.
I was eager to feel the growing pains,
To be soaked in a baptism of fire,
And come out strong, sexy and sophisticated.

Just five years ago,
I was a depressed, suicidal self-loather
Counting on student life to reduce

The borders of his comfort zone to rubble,
Cast out the craven contentment
And leave only the interesting and engaging.
I was asking for it.
Tempting fate,
The Goddess,
Or whoever was directing then.
I was practically begging
The powers that be
(Be they higher chaos or order)
To give that old poetic irony
Another bloody shake.
And as these things tend to go,
Neither the journey, nor the destination
That I got,
Was what I had expected.

When you put all your stock,
All your hope of becoming
Better, stronger, wiser etc.
Into the student lifestyle,
One of guaranteed stress
And fatigue (if you want to do well)
With some binge and bohemia
For those who have the time,
The money and the stomach
For such things,
You are setting yourself up
To fail.

So it was then, that I spent
My first year desperately
Trying to keep up, foolishly
Trying to get my mental health
To improve merely through osmosis,
By being around inspiring people
And exciting situations,
Leaning hard on some people,

Until the attachment became
 A dependency of validation,
 Parasitic in nature,
 Pitiful in scope.

The next few years were spent,
 Pulled back by Paroxetine,
 Fixing and regretting,
 Waiting for a reconciliation
 That never really came.
 You see, just as the addiction
 to validation and connection
 Had broken friendships,
 So too would the desperation
 For reconciliation hamper
 My chance to move on or start anew.

If you cherish friendships
 Merely as fodder for one-way validation,
 Or seek connections merely
 As antidotes to loneliness,
 As sources for inspiration,
 As promises of self-improvement
 And a better, more interesting,
 More exciting life,
 You are not loving people
 For people's sake.
 You are loving them for the mark
 They might make on you,
 You are loving them
 For the uses they might have.

And so I shuffled onwards
 Patching up the academic failures,
 Dream ever taunting me with
 Glistening scenes of an alternative past,
 Regretting faded friendships,
 Waiting to be let back in

The lives and circles
 I myself chose to walk away from,
 Slowly retreating from the university town
 And the need to take antidepressants.

Then my last semester came along
 Coloured by Corona into a vast
 Inundating blur.
 Moving house, living the delicate
 Dance of redecoration, renovation
 And the final furlong of
 Academic work, strangely
 Brought it all together
 In a peculiar picture
 Called Transience.

Student years,
 Some people fill them
 To the brim with memories
 Worth keeping—romantics beware:
 Rarely absent is the surplus
 Of mistakes, dead-end relations,
 Wasteful drama that would not
 Stop stinging, if not for
 The speed of life.
 Others, workmanlike
 March forward towards
 Their achievement first, be it
 Academic, or job-market
 Preparation, to save their
 Snippets of buoyancy as a treat.

Some manage to do both,
 And blessed be their luck.
 Some people struggle
 To do either, and with
 That dull, discoloured filter
 I am forced to look upon

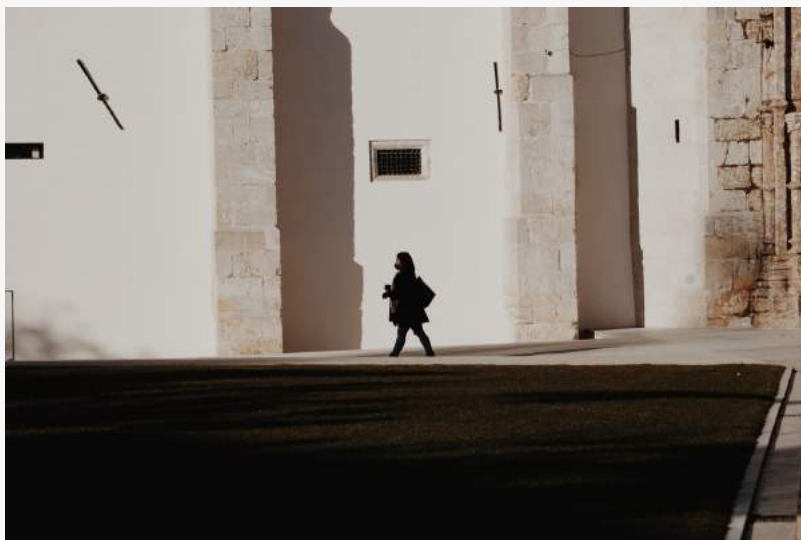
The so-called golden years
Of youth and see
Mostly piss.

Regretting the mishaps and missteps
Is easy, just mingle
Your present FOMO
With glowing scenes from
Your imagined past,
Whitewashed and streamlined
With every reminiscence;
Harder is finding comfort
In loss, in the struggles
That once seemed celestial
In size but with time shrunk
To forgettable grime; Harder
Is cherishing the tiny gems
That shine unsullied and refuse
To imagine them planet size;
Hardest, to look upon a picture
Called Transience and see
Beauty in perpetually becoming
Imperfection.

Tuur Verheyde is a twenty-four year old Belgian poet. His work often discusses current events, progressive politics, spirituality and highbrow and popular culture as well as personal experiences and stories.



Rita Cadima de Oliveira



Rita, 31, Portugal. Sea, land and mountain. Cinema and photography. If you give her a plane and a map you will make her happy. Instagram: @ritacadimaoliveira. Letterboxd: Olirita.

I met a woman like that

SAMIKSHA RANSOM

there is a woman

with metal in her chest
and ink in her throat

she is like scotch mist
her iris, a cold cyan winter

her legs of lacquered glass
are castles in the air

she does not walk
she floats.

there is a woman
who is a crashing river

she swells
gushes, rises, recedes

brown sugar mixed with iron,
i know a woman like that

a ritual, a phenomena
someone's past. saudade.

Samiksha Tulika Ransom is an Indian poet. Her work has appeared in the *Colorism Healing Writing Contest 2020* anthology and in magazines such as *Verse of Silence*. She is also the managing editor for *All Ears* magazine. Instagram: @samiksha_ransom.



16" in Diameter; Mixed Media Collage
on Circle Panel; 2021

Springtime Roses

TWIGGY BOYER

Memories are recollections of the past, a collection of fleeting moments ingrained within us forever. My work seeks to explore how our own memories are often parallel to another person's. I believe that we have all shared the same sort of memory as someone else but from a different perspective. I aim to bring a sense of connection to one another through filters of culture, traditions, and time often using found photographs, collage and drawing elements. I want to bring the viewer a visual experience and encourage an emotional response — borrowing aspects from the memory of others; I mould them into my own and aim to create new ones for others to borrow from.

Twiggy Boyer is a French mixed media collage artist currently living in South Florida. She graduated from the Maryland Institute College of Art in 2012 with a BFA in painting and curatorial studies and has since been a part of a number of group exhibitions and publications.

Happy Holidays

TUUR VERHEYDE

Within the hollows of my heart
 I see the soul of seven centuries
 Emptied in a jar.
 As July follows suit, the cracks
 The wind, the red flames curling
 Against the dusty veranda glass
 Tell me tales I've heard before.
 The routine, the walls gazing
 From behind cardboard tower blocks;
 I have seen this all ten billion times
 Before the sun went up.
 The smell of summer green
 The sound of dogs chasing
 Balls, bones, each other or us;
 Not a sensation is uncharted here,
 Not a thought, sentiment rerun every day,
 I need to fade into the walls,
 Become their ghost, become the blood
 Pulsing through this home.
 And know not of a world,
 Be ignorant of what I miss,
 As the life slips from my tired nose.
 I am in hell-cloaked heaven,
 A purgatory bubble within
 The flaming town of Dis.

I wish I could keep my mind
 From rising above the wall,
 To peek at folk and fun beyond this hole.

Let it seep into my flesh,
The bore, the routine,
The smell of garden green,
Let it be my Lethe.
I am absent now from social spheres,
I write my elegies of longing
To breezes carrying the birdsong.
I wish you well, living folk!
Go with blessed treads,
Says I, a ghoul of yesteryear.



Tuur Verheyde is a twenty-four year old Belgian poet. His work often discusses current events, progressive politics, spirituality and highbrow and popular culture as well as personal experiences and stories.

The Dried Leaf Project

DAMINI RATHORE





While crossing the driveway at home in Jaipur, I noticed a lot of dried leaves of various forms and out of those the most exciting were the leaves that had fallen off the two Champa trees. The trees were planted some twenty years ago and since then have witnessed me, changing like the fallen leaves in every season through all these years.

I picked up few of those leaves and one winter afternoon I decided to photograph them in my veranda at home. It was a sudden burst of beautiful forms coming to life, once again. The leaves, despite having served their purpose, still had something more to give. And till this day I have three of those dried leaves kept in a box as captured memories, one of an 8 year old going to school in the morning, to an 18 year old leaving home for the first time to a new city, and now, a few years later going to work at a new place in her hometown.



Damini Rathore is a graphic designer and photographer based in Jaipur. In the after-hours, she keeps journals, postcard series and zines of her personal experiences and her travels. Tangible arts and crafts which involve use of hands are of special interest to Damini.

America's Heartland

E.A. GREGOR

omaha—my first encounter with a city—
a place where suburbia thrives.
I grew up feeling “safe” and suffocated
by nuclear family ideals.

trees line each manicured block,
houses have the same forgettable features.
“amber waves of grain” hits differently here.
you can drive 10 minutes and find yourself near a stockyard,
the stench of cows lingers in the air.

there's a beauty in the simplicity here,
something comforting
in the predictability of a flyover state.
people grow up quickly,
rushing toward the pristine altar of family life.

there isn't much room for imagination or big dreams,
but damn, you sure have mastered small talk.
chain restaurants are often your best choice,
and grocery stores are large enough
to fit three carts in every aisle.

despite my lack of appreciation for america's heartland,
I never imagined I'd miss it so much
after more than a year without seeing my mom.
I've almost ordered omaha steaks three times since last march,
even though I've been a vegetarian for most of my life.

all summer, I craved fresh corn on the cob
and picking strawberries in the june sun.
I find myself missing drives to nowhere.
or even walking around the manmade lake
in my parents' subdivision.

oh, nebraska,
how I hate it there,
but nostalgia has a way of taking hold, when all
you want to do is hug your mom.



e.a. gregor (she/her/hers) is a multidisciplinary artist and poet based in Chicago. Her work explores contrasts, communities, and nostalgia. She enjoys drinking cortados and experimenting with 35mm film.

Effigy

REN PIKE

Diasporic stories are all
I've ever known. My heart is
waning slowly. My tongue is
losing words. At night, my legs

abandon this bed I've deftly made.
Sleepwalk the full 5000
to barrens now re-framed.
I take requisite ferries to reach

reluctant shores. In the gathering darkness
lit vessels line the wharves.
I see the moon enormous.
I pull hard on the oars.

I fish all night in effigy
for truths I need restored.

Ren Pike grew up in Newfoundland. Through sheer luck, she was born into a family who understood the exceptional value of a library card. Her work has appeared in journals such as *Riddle Fence*, *Sublunary Review*, and *IceFloe Press*. When she is not writing, she wrangles data for non-profit organizations in Calgary, Canada. Website: <http://rpike.mm.st/>

Chumik

SHAMBHALA TALES FLIGHT OVER TSO NGONPO

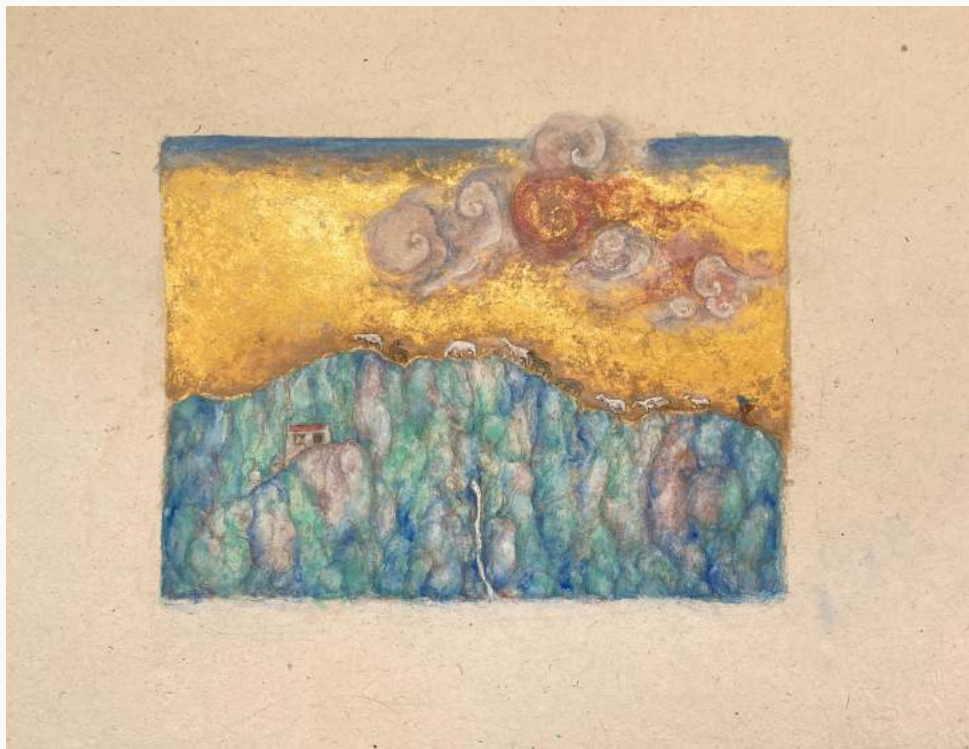


Year: 2021

Medium: Natural pigments, shell gold on paper

Dimension (cm): 30.5x25.5

SHAMBHALA TALES
ANI GOMPA ON THE CLIFF



Year: 2021

Medium: Natural pigments, gold leaf on paper

Dimension (cm): 30x24

WHERE THE PEAR TREE BLOSSOMS



Year: 2020 | Dimension (cm): 24x33
Medium: Natural pigments, shell gold on paper

Chumik (Chia Hsun Yuan) is a Taiwanese artist whose work addresses themes of spirituality and the human condition as filtered through her subjective experience. Transitions across continents and cultures fuelled her curiosity, and imbued her paintings with a certain keenness to connect, to search within, and to nurture grounds for shared experiences.

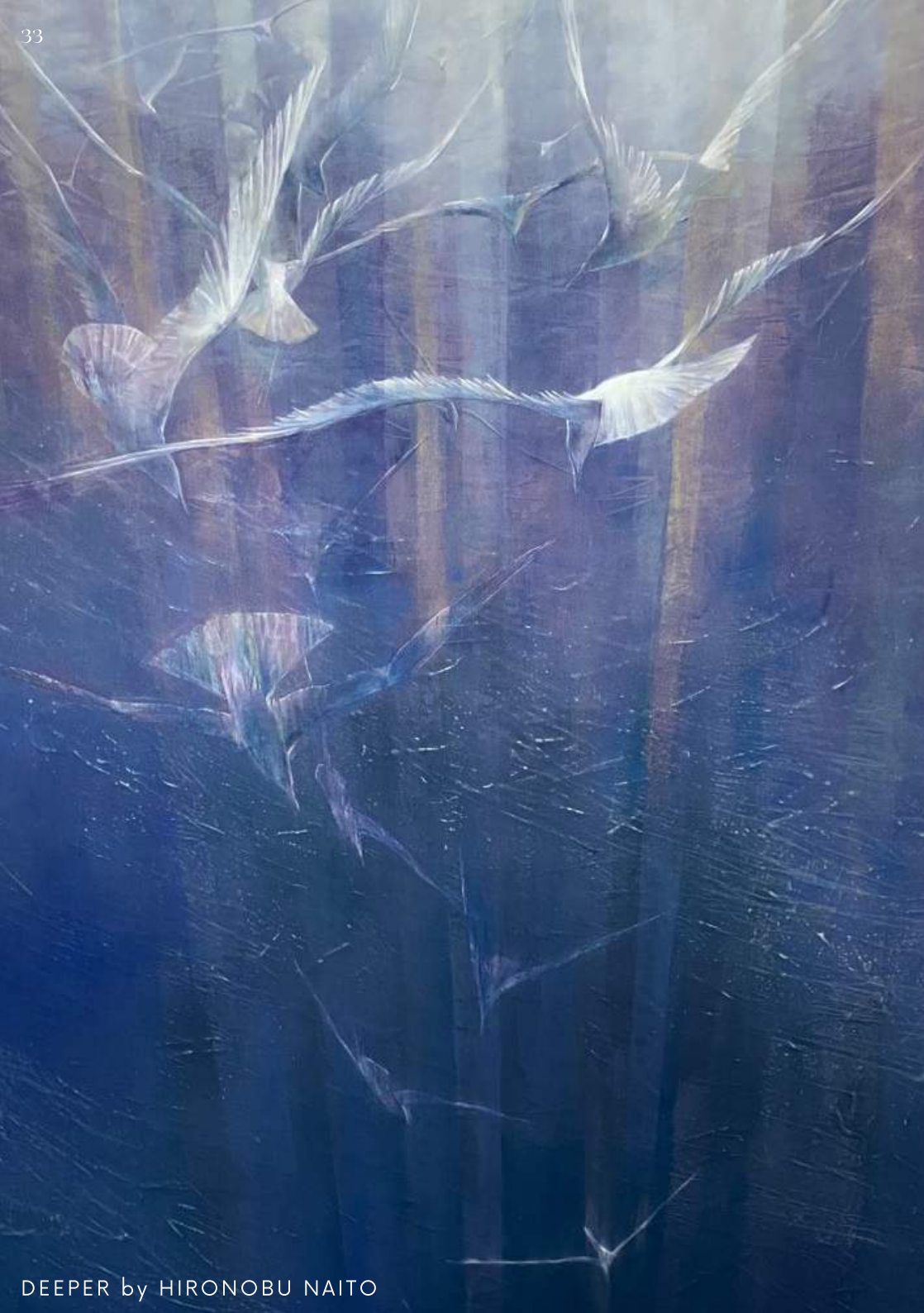
Sonnet for the Vintage Boat Swings

IN THE SINGAPORE BOTANIC GARDENS

NICKI BLAKE

the shape — curved metal hull, the facing seats
the frame — is instantly familiar
here in the gardens a small rescued fleet
sails me toward the shores of yesteryear
to the time when we had the landed house
the swing anchored on a sea of patchy grass
I rocked in its metal keel for countless hours
under skies of bunga kamboja stars
then redevelopment's encroaching tide
swept us away from houses and from place
the old swings vanished — sold? or cast aside? —
and since then, I have seen them nowhere else
until today, when I commandeered a craft
to navigate the straits from present to past

Nicki Blake is an emerging writer based in Perth, Western Australia. Born in England with a heritage that is both European and South-East Asian, Nicki's writing focuses on themes of identity, inclusivity, the natural world, and the interaction between people and their environments. Twitter @strawberrythief



My Husband is Always Missing

ISMIM PUTERA

My husband is always missing:
last night I found him in
my grandmother's dream
he dressed like her; *songket*
wrapped his upper body
glossy hair like sun-dried sea kelp;
his coral-coloured lips were
salty; two eyes dark blue
but shadowy.

This morning he was part
man, part sea; his heart
beat faster than the
lightning that split the sea
into two unequal halves.
Torrents of tears no longer
wet my earthen face.

His voice rang from
the abyss, ransacking our
little hut; he yelled
"*sayang! sayang!*"
it meant "love! love!"
He was my late afternoon tides
clashing himself into my
breasts; hands sending waves
to curve my shorelines.
My husband cannot be found
in daylight, even you have
two hundred suns to
enlighten the sea floor
He's here, a millipede
curling in the cleft of
my wound.

Ismim Putera (he/him) is the author of poetry chapbook "Tide of Time" (*Mug and Paper Publishing, 2021*). He had recently won 3rd place in the 7th Singapore Poetry Contest.



Cabín

ISABELLA MELIANS

Mother left the
room
ten minutes ago

I

I heard her
walk to the bathroom
and turn on the tap

I heard the water fall
reluctantly, like it
hated being in this house

I heard every groan
of every pipe–
they must hate it here too

II

Tonight they fed me
the sickly sweet taste of
canned corn kernels

Mother turned it
in the pan, over and over,
licking the steam droplets off her lips

I didn't brush my teeth this time–
I want to taste dinner
for as long as I could

III

Father came in
after dawn,
smelling of sweat and soot

Dirty laundry piles
at the foot of my bed, in
musty, mildewed mounds

He left
pinecones in
his coat pockets

IV

Five days ago:
my Sister washed
our syrup-stained sheets

Mother tucked them into
the bedpost
until they grew taut

They don't loosen,
no matter how hard
I tug at the mattress corners

V

I know the sun
will rise tomorrow
at 6am

I will rise from
this bed,
these blankets

I will fall to
my knees
and pray

First appeared in *K'in Literary Journal*



Isabella Melians (she/her) is a sophomore attending school in south Florida. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Fever Dreams*, *NonBinary Review*, *the B'K*, and *Southchild Lit*; her are pieces featured worldwide- India, Ireland, and the Channel Islands. She is also the managing editor for *Armonía Mag* and poetry editor for *Outlander Zine* and *Kalopsia Literary*. Insta: @isabellam_04.

Undelivered Mail

HANSIKA JETHNANI

There must be a pool of lost envelopes lying around somewhere,
or perhaps a mountain of them
piled up

losses

unread letters hoping to find a way back
to their founding post office or intended home;
preferring the latter.

The burden of one another carving creases
chewing unread sentences
aching to settle on lips of fingers
meant to cause the creasing

The desire to be swallowed
by a grief less
tongue.

Hansika Jethnani is a poet & visual artist. She floats between feeling like a cloud and an onion. She writes about themes such as colonialism, migration, shame she learned to carry, shame she is learning to unlearn, her fatness, her queerness and her mental squabbles. Her work has previously appeared in *Young Ignorantes*, *Whip Zine*, *Mush Stories* and *Chaicopy*.

Wild Sunrise

ADAM WALTERS

Hoffmann woke from thirst. The grey
gold hum of morning was leagues away.
The night he'd finished translating
from the Portuguese (a work out of Macau?) –
“These city people are different
in their troubling fantasies...”

In Warsaw he had left Hippel,
an advocate, like him,
of bilingual education. The native peaks
of Rosicrucian churches
now seemed, like the tea-cups,
fractal in the light.

Adam Walters is 25 years old, originally from Marple in Greater Manchester and currently lives and works in London. His work has appeared in *192 Magazine* and *Amethyst Review*.

7:43

ADAM WALTERS

Caught without time, the rain struck the crevices.
The late buzz of autumn smoke,
as felt by one you loved, or could have.
Framed by the window, an eternal
dropping motion, which a life of waiting cannot reclaim.
The noiseless splendour of fluorescent grey,
pitched between darkness, dream and endless love.
Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven.

Adam Walters is 25 years old, originally from Marple in Greater Manchester and currently lives and works in London. His work has appeared in *192 Magazine* and *Amethyst Review*.

Womankind
MARIA MARIA ACHA-KUTSCHER





María María Acha-Kustcher, *Womankind. Saudade*, 2020.
Polyptych. Photographic Collage.

"One of my most intimate and intuitive projects is 'Womankind', which consists of several series of digital photographic collages to generate fictional documents centred on women. These were made using found archival images; from the Internet, magazines, books; and my own photographs. In these compositions emerge, on one side, my complex cultural identity with Creole, Chinese, and African roots; and on the other side, a dreamlike world transmitted by my grandmother, of German origin.

I created 'Womankind. Saudade' during the confinement due to the Covid-19 pandemic, in 2020. The images of this polyptych deal with melancholy and the communion between the emotional state with the environment, between the internal and external landscape, presenting different female figures in a contemplative state that could be a revision of the romantic tradition."

After working in advertising in Mexico City, **María María Acha-Kutscher** moved to Madrid in 2001, where she currently lives and where she took her first steps in the world of art and feminist militancy. Using multiple modes of expression such as drawing, photography and archive images the artist produces long research pieces dealing with gender discrimination. She is represented by ADN Gallery in Barcelona. www.achakutscher.com. Instagram: @achakutscher



SAMUEL JAYACHANDRAN

Fireflies Unlimited

ANNA KISBY

We're in the half-built house
 in Vermont – me and the man
 I nearly marry, but don't – unroofed, holes
 where windows will fit. In sleeping bags
 on untreated boards, night falls and fireflies
 arrive – a quickstep, a certainty, a flute added to
 flute they synchronise. This was the dreamtime,
 the simple time, that time between schooldays
 and real life. Do you remember such a time
 of firsts? We were living hand to mouth –
 dollars counted into palms,
 money soft as moth-wings.

In those days we went looking
 for what we didn't know was there.
 Our reward: fireflies without borders –
 un-tame, a coming-together-last-minute plan.
 We watch them sandpaper the sky, they jerk for joy,
 they jagger, god's own migraine. In lightning-tongue
 they sing to us *Forget your sad cities of light, we are*
our own ferris wheels. Now the roof must be on,
 the forest cleared for lawn, each patio slab
 a square of extinguished light. Anytime I want
 I can catch them there, fireflies in a jar –
 a torch-full of past, banging at the sides of this glass.

First appeared in on the UK Poetry Society. Winner of the BBC Proms Poetry Competition 2016.

Anna Kisby is a poet, archivist and author of the pamphlet *All the Naked Daughters* (Against the Grain Press, 2017). She won the *Binsted Arts prize 2019*, *BBC Proms Poetry competition 2016*, and was commended in *Faber's New Poets Scheme*. Originally from London, she now lives in rural south-west England.

Vineyards & Graveyards

CHRISTIAN GARDUNO

Her eyes are pleated
 as I tip-toe across the bridge of her nose
 She bites me with her slight sighs
 her arms stretched out like railway lines-
 infinite in each direction
 and out of the blue, I consider the snow falling in the Summer Garden
 She says, as we eat Chinese takeaway in Emperor's Gate,
 "You know, I've had that very thought myself"

Her eyes are pleated
 as I reach to open our second bottle of strawberry Jinro
 [which I know will render me down to a rhesus]
 we become embroiled by a silence
 Suddenly, neither one of us has ever spoken before in our lives
 and I remember that there is no rain above the clouds
 She shrugs, puts spoons in our yogurt
 and I wonder if the sky really can go on forever

Christian Garduno is the recipient of the 2019 national Willie Morris Award for Southern Poetry. Garduno is a Finalist in the 2020-2021 Tennessee Williams & New Orleans Writing Contest. He lives and writes along the South Texas coast with his wonderful wife Nahemie and young son Dylan.

The Tuscan Swing

AISAN L. AFSHAR

The Tuscan swing by the cliff is tied to two Tuscan orange trees.

I named one Lola after you; after the way you held my hand, and the way you danced around, the way you made the tea, the way you smelt and breathed. Lola, my lady of sorrows, Lola my sweet-tangy cup of *Sanguinaccio dolce*.

You were the chocolate, swirling in the dark bubbling pot that already churned with blood, you were the life and the demise.

The other Tuscan tree, for how much I feared that I wasn't the one, I just named Orange. Orange like the glow of the tiny fireflies, the nights we danced in the streets, the nights I bought you wine.

The leaves are sharp and green, the shade of your witty eyes.

It was Lola and Orange who held me in their arms. And Lola and Orange told me it was fine when it was your orange tree that was cursed and not mine. They told me it was love, the memories that we shared, they told me no matter how, just like *Sanguinaccio dolce*, you were sour with that acrid taste, it was still love. Because we had memories, and memories hold the one thing that hate can't plague.

They hold truths and those truths have a name. You called it Nostalgia but I called it pain.

It was Lola and Orange who rocked me on the Tuscan Swing, by the very edge of the cliff, and their leaves quivered and stayed, until the last moment I let the wind carry me, down into that lane again. That lane I call pain.

Aisan L. Afshar is currently studying English Literature as an undergraduate at the University of Tehran and has only been previously published in the Australian Writer's center (furious fiction, June edition, 2019)



Vellichor

HARINY V

when you crumple the scented sheets
and kick your shoes away from the bed
we do not think of hearts that are set to break
or candles that drown in their lights

i look back at you and smile
build towers with green flowers, seeds too red
and pasta that is fresh. place them on a wet plate
and watch you take out spoons and mugs from an empty drain

shades of pink. a range of red.
scatter across your open face. i watch them
shiver. i watch them change. and i know that we are
too close to want another start over again.

you are here. you are not.
you hug me and walk far away.
i dust and dust the scattered pillows
and get under sheets that still remember you.

sometimes i look at you confused
trying to search for a feeling that would rise up new.
lying under a ledge of books that are orange and blue
i try to write down all my words for you.

the days are cold and nights alone
my journals and notes are as fresh as you.
i take away the milk in used cups and trays
and wonder if there is anything more you have to say.

we do not look at the sun most days
or dwell on the times that raced past our pace.
i see new autumn leaves above me
and think of mangoes and forts when you are fast asleep.

when the lights are still on in our street
we open our windows wide
sway together holding our breath
and kiss like we are the only thing that's there.



Hariny is a 22-year-old writer who grew up amidst the thriving Dravidian culture and ancient temples in the city of Madurai in Tamil Nadu. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in Creative Writing from Newcastle University, UK. When there is no writing for the day, she can be found lost between the pages of fresh hardcovers or intensely focused over a pot of boiling pasta.

Hilda

KAREN LETHLEAN

Perth 1967

You have to understand something about my childhood before I begin to tell you about Hilda. My father was the sort of man who hit first and asked questions later. Difficult to explain to people who did not have similar experiences. I might want to wish away his two personalities: to his friends; a charismatic, man's man. At home he was a nightmare. He was mean, cruel, but at least girls in my family were not sexually abused.

I'm not trying to make excuses, but my relationship with males was heavily influenced by duck-for-cover self-protection instincts. Little wonder I grew to not like men.

Why didn't mum do something? She probably didn't have much choice. No women's shelters then, minimal and lowly paid jobs; where else would she go? She just stayed. I know this all sounds like a feeble justification. I can't remember where I heard it, or if I'd made up the story of her sole attempt to leave him. More than once I ran over the tale in my head; narrated her walking through Perth's summer heat, tugging at least one kid's reluctant arm, pushing a laden pram, fleeing with her young family to her mother's. Just to be sent away with, 'you've made your bed now you have to lay in it!'

It's not meant to be cathartic to share all this now, just explaining my box of existence. Trying to establish that nary tenderness existed for me, before Hilda.

In High School, Italian boys with tight pants, macho effervescence and way too much confidence patrolled playing fields and corridors. I cringed inside at these embodiments of my father. Even though I was head and shoulders taller, they still intimidated. My limbs were not yet resembling their Sophia Loren

image therefore I was a target. Let's face it, long skinny legs, knobbly kneed, pigeon toed, wearing glasses, braces on my buck teeth; interested in books and science — I did not fit their box of desire.

To make matters worse, I had a penchant for strong females. Blame it on my father's one sister – Sylvia. She used to say, 'I don't want equality, women have always been superior to men'. I longed for alternative female role models and became obsessed with the Avenger's TV show. Not the Disney movie franchise, but swashbuckling English spies with femme fatal assistants. Watching Emma and Diana, accompany Bowler hat wearing John Steed became an indulgence. For a weekly fix, I could tolerate possible punishment.

In some ways, Hilda was a teenage version of these women — she certainly came to my rescue, although not because of the school-yard name calling. She just embodied a friend through those sad, lonely years.

The daughter of Dutch immigrants who gave her what was an ordinary name by their standards, yet wonderfully exotic to my ears, they were comfortably well-off compared to my box of squalor. Hilda's sister Doreen kept a horse stabled amongst market gardens in Osborne Park. Horse crazy, only took a whiff of baled hay and sunlight through stable air to send me in euphoria. Yet another example of their affluence and an adolescent dream I dare not even ask about. Once a well-meaning councillor said, 'why didn't you ask for a pony...?' Keep your mouth shut, don't request anything, and stay out of the way of hands, fists and bruise inflicting implements — my survival strategies.

During my time with Hilda, I fell in love with Dutch salted liquorice, iced ginger biscuits, blue and white china depicting windmills.

Both of us were tall and skinny. Hilda possessed straight strawberry blond hair (which today's colour technicians would labour long and hard to achieve, but she despised), cut blunt just below her ears, accentuating an elegant neck. Compared with my mousey brown, razor cut and sticking up in multiple directions locks, Hilda's was a crowning glory. Boys taunted her as 'carrot top'

top', 'fire head', or mistook her Netherland heritage as German which was a real insult. It felt amazing to bond over mutual torment.

Even now I can recall meeting her in a grassy patch halfway between the two houses and laying watching clouds float past while we talked about books, horses and television. Shared secrets like, 'those Italian boys in their jeans....'

'Yes, how do they get them so tight?'

'You know they put socks down them.'

Smells of wild oat weeds drying to blonde in summer even now evoke a tang of nostalgia for those innocent days. A time when I touched her ginger tinged skin which made me feel like I was floating outside my imprisoning box.

For a teenager who was horse mad, all Hilda had to offer was the tiniest equine snippet to seduce me further. Bring Solitaire in from paddocks, and we'd groom her. I'd head home up the hill, heady with scents of stable dust, saddle grease and hay. Closeness of our fingers, her patient instructions as we plaited mane and tail, or polished leather, all filled with dizzying solidarity.

Up close to roof rafters are pieces of tack, saddles mostly. Covered with a fine layer of grit. Even though impossible to feel inside, wind filters through those weathered timbers enough to make fragments of chaff, specks of spider webs and hoof dust form a film across any surface. My horse experiences were anything but flat.

Light angles in, strokes of illumination appear to chase object until a horse moves to break beams. Air heavy with smells of hay, feed, manure. Noises of tails swishing, teeth clicking, snorts, push of flesh against stall walls.

Any sleep-over nights were alive with all sorts of new sensations. Their house built on a smaller block with Pine trees along the western edge, to wake in a fold out bed with scents of needles, heaven! This is another of those triggers that creates a throat lump.

‘Get in here and we’ll keep each other warm.’

I felt a slither of flesh, smooth skin, picturing tiny ginger hairs under my fingertips beyond excitement. I touched her, she let her fingers trace across my belly. ‘Turn over, face the wall.’

Her arm encircled from behind, I could feel her hips against my pyjama pants, and there was radiating warmth. Her breath tingled the back of my neck. Her small breasts pushed behind my shoulder blades.

‘It feels better if you take your pants off.’ I could feel her pubis against bare skin.

I didn’t know what happened, but it wasn’t long before my body shuddered out of control.

Following such loveliness, I did a stupid thing. Wrote a note to a girl in a senior class. With a picture of the actress from The Avengers and informed her of resemblance. Added to school room and passageway taunts of four eyes, giraffe legs, bean pole, I was now called a ‘Leso’. Hilda’s response was, ‘why on earth did you do that?’ As if I needed to be told that I’d done something wrong. I remained trapped again in familiar “useless article” boxes. Hilda absented herself from my vicinity at school and opportunities to spend time either at the stables or her place suddenly became scarcer than a wet day in Perth during January.

Saw her again in the early 80s, hair colour my first hint Hilda even existed. Seated at Max Kay’s Scottish Theatre Restaurant, she wore a simple black dress which embraced her slim form, I wondered if possible to get as close as this fabric. My attire: wait-staff uniform (white shirt, bow-tie and black trousers). At first, I thought she wouldn’t recognize me. I must have changed over the years, and would no longer fit into her pigeon hole.

'You work here?'

Yet she turned away to some table top anecdote, laughing way too loudly. So, in my waitress role I did what all good serving staff should - made myself invisible. But from my elevated perspective I could see her thin hand grasp a man's thigh in a possessive manner. A moment which shouted loud about my status as a half explored boxed toy to Hilda. She merely toyed with my future, unaware that I would discover my sisterhood independent of her influence.



Karen Lethlean is a retired English teacher. She has won a few writing awards through Australian and UK competitions. Including *Best of Times*, with *Bum Joke*. In her other life Karen is a triathlete who has done Hawaii Ironman championships twice.

Anastasia Litetskikh



Anastasia Litetskikh is a Russian artist from the Middle Urals. She graduated from the Perm College of Art, and is now a student of the Stieglitz Academy of Art and Design, Faculty of Painting & Restoration. She works mainly in mixed techniques in the genre of still life and landscapes. Last year she worked mostly with mono- and diatype experimental print techniques.

And then she conquers

SMRITI PRABAKARAN

utopia.

beautiful utopia.

saudade keeps me up at night.

a naïve little dreamer, wistfulness in her eyes & longing in her heart
wipes away the tears of disillusionment.

blinded by the harsh light that had flooded in when the walls of the
fortress of her protected childhood in one swift motion had fallen, she
beholds, for the first time, the world in all its stained glory as it lay
sprawled before her,

complete with its imperfections, inescapable injustice & inexplicable
cruelty, sneering at her, extending its vicious arms –one to embrace &
the other to kill.

i lie in bed, heart pounding in my ears, waiting for the angry voices of
my mind to quieten & heal from the day's trauma.

slowly i let my thoughts drift away from the demons, inevitably they find
it:

utopia.

beautiful utopia.

a world where its most dominant species was not irredeemably
fractured amongst itself, thriving on treachery & brutal oppression.

utopia was the celebration of the divine feminine. utopia would never
bear witness to a bunch of men, secure in manhood they often
profoundly lack, form all of the government, executive & judiciary &
pass legislation that not only asserted their destructive dominance over
but also severely undermined bodily autonomy of any & all women.
utopia would never ask of the wife to bend over backwards attending

to the whims and fancies of the husband. utopia would never reduce a woman to her reproductive abilities alone. utopia was in a young girl, heart brimming with dreams, desire & a certain invigorating passion for life; in utopia, she wasn't sold to the highest bidder in the auction called marriage. she walked the earth, head held high, the might & devastating royalty of whose mind the world knelt down before.

descriptions, never romanticisation; it was the most perfect embodiment of beauty.

utopia.

this world could not be any more different. she does not want this world, she loathes it.

she decides to change it.

utopia may be hidden away in the deepest trenches of history & fantasy but she knew just how that distance could be traversed. how the unattainable could be conquered.

it would take the systematic dismantling & destabilising of every institution of tyranny man has ever dared build on this sacred ground, her sacred home. man's world, as we know it, shall end and in the ashes of his annihilation, the New Age will be born & all dues paid in full.

saudade. in the comfort of its promise, i become her again.

overwhelmed & shivering, our little dreamer closes her eyes, and amidst the chaos of uncertainty, a faint glimmer of hope says hello.

p.s. the fire that spark incited, later devoured the mightiest & proud forests.

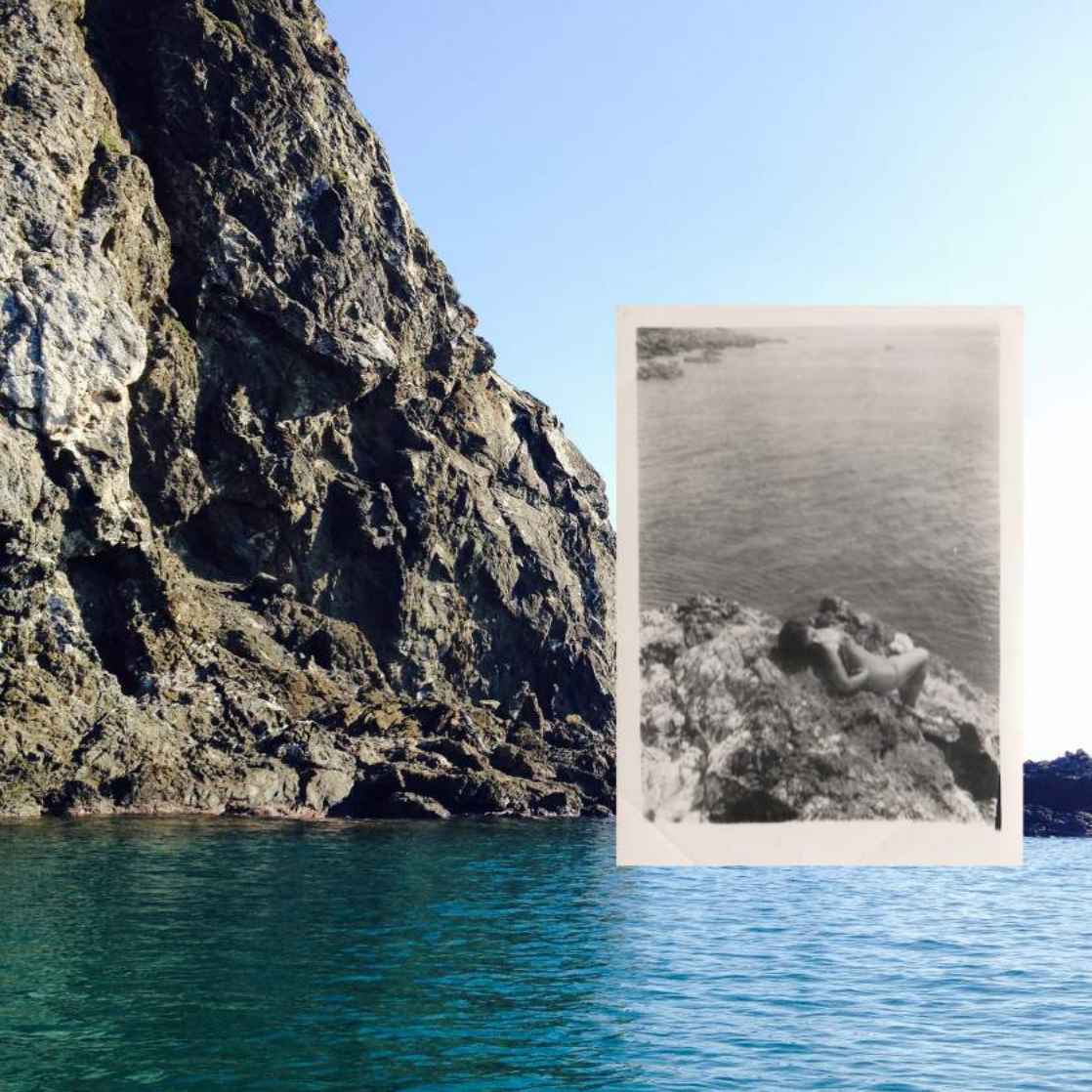
Smriti Prabakaran is a passionate debater, voracious reader, environmentalist & a proud feminist. She has published her own collaborative poetry book, enjoys travelling, reading crime thrillers & playing Mozart on the piano. She hails from Madurai & is currently pursuing her undergraduate education in Hansraj College, University of Delhi.

Familiar Strangers on the Rocks

AYLIN SAYEK

Found photos. Stashed in the dusty corners of second hand shops, the inevitable sad end for photographs. I bought them, solely because I felt I was saving them from disappearance. I slowly became a collector of lost memories. Nowadays, you shoot thousands of images, share them, store them, and then delete them when you don't like them anymore. They have become fast moving consumer goods. Found photos, on the contrary, are so permanent. So permanent in fact that I, a stranger, ended up finding them. I collect found photos wondering what will become of our own photos of our happy moments.





These pictures of rocky shorelines (used as a background to a selection of my found photo collection) are from my favorite summer moments. Strangers from a different era, traveling to my favorite summer moments. I believe we all long for the past. Social media is full of photos taken with filters to make them look like old photos. We try so hard to turn digital into analog. But none of those so-called vintage filters reflect the feeling of old photos with their jagged edges, warm colours, grainy quality. The old concept of photography, its privacy and intimacy, has completely changed. We no longer take photos to make a photo album or write the date and a personal note on the back. Social media - which is based on sharing - opened up the doors of digital world and we forgot the pleasure of taking a lasting picture.



I've read that nostalgia has psychological benefits; that it serves as a tool for helping people overcome life's hardships. Nostalgia is beyond melancholy; to remember old familiar feelings, the past, and childhood is emotionally reassuring. Some can say some of the photos are bittersweet, I can understand. Looking at people's lives from a long long time ago, feels so distant and unknown, yet so close and familiar. I look at these photos and see 'a life lived and enjoyed.'



Aylin Sayek studied Industrial Design in Middle East Technical University and has an MA in Integrated Marketing Communications from Emerson College. She worked as a design writer for newspapers and magazines in Turkey, an event planner for many art and design exhibitions, a designer and communications consultant for many brands. She has been collecting found photos and loving nostalgia for as long as she can remember. She lives between Arsuz, Hatay, and Istanbul.

My Mother in her Greenhouse

BERNARD PEARSON

The glass as I remember
Seemed to have been in
bed with the wood for ever.
Even where the paint and putty
Were just memories.
A place given to that glory,
The smell of tomatoes
Smouldering in the sun.
She would go there sometimes
When that God of hers
Gave her too much trouble.

Bernard Pearson's work appears in many publications worldwide. In 2017 a selection of his poetry 'In Free Fall' was published by *Leaf by Leaf Press*. In 2019 he won second prize in *The Aurora Prize*. His first novel '*Where the Willows End*' was published in 2021.

Samuel Jayachandran



Samuel Jayachandran is a 20 year old final year engineering student from Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu. His photography journey began in 2018, with him capturing sunsets and flowers. He quickly came to realize that photography was a powerful art form and started using it as a tool to express himself and the injustice of discrimination that occurred around him. Instagram: [i_jayachandran](#)

Want

DARBY MURNANE

The city is hungry. The appetite is for soft sighs, poppy-petal blushes on cheeks, lips, legs and things in-between. Everything here is drenched in colour-rich colours like wine reds, twilight purples, the pink of dawn, or the blue of a flame's core.

You see no one but for quick glimpses of tangled limbs; tangled in the same way as the streets. Everything here is entwined.

The people are hungry. The hunger comes as stirrings in the belly- the stirrings of butterflies, of course. Blow a kiss and butterflies slip through parted lips, spinning like petals scattered by a breeze. They twirl and dance as one, seeking and finding other people's butterflies where they entwine again in the air.

You don't speak the city's name. Rather, it exists in the sighs, the whispers, the giggles, and the rushes of heat in the silence between those pretty sounds. It exists in the soft *hish-hish* of butterflies' wings as they drift past your ears.

The butterflies always flutter close enough to whisper invitations, but not so close as to touch, only to have their presence be felt and wanted, only so close as to tease before darting away in the hope that you'll chase after their colours.

You come by chance, a wrong turn down an unintended path. Or maybe a right turn, but of that, you're not yet sure. Though you know that most seek out this place. Many come to the city starved and craving a taste of its refreshments, aching to feel fuller in the oneness of being entwined with its people.

You have known hunger— fleetingly. There and gone so fast that the wings in your belly did not know even to twitch. And so the wings never spoke of their presence. You were too distracted and a weak, momentary appetite

did not prove interesting enough to hold your attention.

Now you wander the city streets, guessing at the nature of the place. The shadows are plentiful, drawn by the closeness of the walls and the abundance of doorways set deep within those walls, like hiding places. The shadows do not reach out as if to catch you, but to show you, or to invite you. The shining whites of eyes and teeth, glimmering sheens of sweat on skin flash from the darkness and beg you to come take a taste, to take a bite. You keep walking. Your stomach still does not growl.

The alleys grow more narrow as you walk, the city's walls pressing closer to brush against you as you slip through. The city's sounds creep closer, the sighs and breathless giggles kissing the delicate skin of your neck and cheeks as you pass. You flush under the heavy press of the heat where each breath lands on your skin. Twisting through the maze of streets, you look for some open space amid the tight tangles of alleys and limbs darting from the deep set doors and arches, desperate for a cooling breath to temper the growing heat.

Until the unmistakable feel of fingers trails across your waist, around your back, then a hand clasps yours, giving it a gentle tug. Distracted by the sudden touch, you let your arm sway in time with the tug and meet the eyes of a stranger, pondering the feel of skin against yours.

Something in your belly *leaps*. You jump at the sensation, yanking your hand away. A million fluttering things are brushing and swiping at the inside of your abdomen and now *climbing* up to your chest, towards your throat. Your mouth opens on instinct. You snap your teeth shut against it. The fluttering quiets to an eager thrum.

The stranger eyes the empty air with a tilted, curious head. They begin to depart.

"Wait," you say. "Come back."

The stranger obeys and turns.

The thrum inside your belly has grown into a demanding tickle. You're overcome with the need to know what it is. Something's alive inside you and you want to let it live. You know it was the stranger's hand that gave this feeling a pulse and you crave another rush. This must be what hunger is and you want to be full.

You reach your hand out. The stranger takes it again, and blows a kiss. Butterflies burst from their mouth and take to the air around your heads.

That thrum in your stomach turns to a fury and this time you let your lips part wide open, certain that you have butterflies too. You feel them now at the back of your throat, rolling over your tongue. You wonder what colour they'll be.

The swarm erupts from your mouth and—they're moths.

Moths?

They don't float like the butterflies do, but whirl around your head in wild frenzy, moving in time with spastic cadence of your blood and breath. They dart to-and-fro, colliding in the air and reeling back from the butterflies, confused where to go and what to do. You're caught in the cloud of jittering, gray creatures, disappearing and reappearing in your vision like softly furred puffs of smoke. They have no colour but ash and bruises.

The stranger pulls you in closer, their butterflies crowding in too. Everything's gone blurry in the manic press of wings and hands. The weight of the heat and burn of the closeness is suffocating now and your breath comes in broken fits and starts.

It's too much, too fast, too intense.

"Stop!" you gasp.

You fling out an arm to push the stranger away. As you shove your hand against the stranger's chest, something is crushed beneath your palm. It was a moth. You stare as all the other moths go still. They drop to the ground.

"Stop," you say again, quieter now. "Do not touch. Not there, not now."

It is quiet. The stranger steps back. A soft intake of breath breaks the silence, and the butterflies disappear. The stranger walks away.

It is cold now.

Darby Murnane is a graduate student journalist with the University of North of Texas, and holds a BFA in Creative Writing from the University of Maine at Farmington. When she's not writing hard news, she's scribbling lines for a short story or personal essay in the middle of the night.

30th September

NAVEEN KISHORE

My heart full of flowers
that had wilted lost
their colour
to grief
watched
it seep through
the once fresh red
petals
on to the grass
once green
now yellowed
by so many seasons
of lamenting loss
and sweeping the floor
of leaves that had turned
to rust
made brittle and
dusty
by thoughts
that had come from afar
to die
with feet made leaden
shuffling dragging
one foot
after another
trampling
the uncomplaining leaves
that had once sheltered them
from the blaze
of an unforgiving
and relentless
sun

Naveen Kishore is a theatre lighting designer, photographer, and the publisher at Seagull Books.

Tale of Two Worlds

ATHIBA BALASUBRAMANIAN



Acrylic on Canvas, 24 in (Dia)

The blue, and the iridescent white, two worlds that share certain characteristics between them but can never be merged into one truly unique being - ever. A Hilma Af Klint-inspired non-objective abstraction drawn from the perspective of the blue world.

Athiba is an architect, designer, and art enthusiast. Inkinglight is a passion project that he started back in 2013; his minimalist works are largely influenced by colors and compositions found in nature or manmade forms.

