

louden singletree

WRITING AND VISUAL ART *from the*
UNIVERSITY OF THE FRASER VALLEY



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louden singletree

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE FRASER VALLEY'S
JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY WRITERS AND ARTISTS

The Louden Singletree is UFV's literary and visual arts journal. Since its inception in 2009, the Louden Singletree has been a forum in which students, alumni, faculty, and staff of the university can share their creative work.

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Issue #16

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To our sponsor for their financial contributions that made publishing this magazine possible.

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Editors' Note

The sixteenth issue of *Louden Singletree* is brought to you by nervous excitement, late-night WhatsApp messages, and endless ounces of caffeine.

The Editorial Board owes every single author, artist, reader, and contributor an enormous thanks for helping pull this issue together, and we are especially grateful to Professor John Carroll and last issue's board members, Anna McCausland and Carly Fleming, who were invaluable compass points on our journey to publication. Our thanks also goes to Julia Dovey, UFV's Writer in Residence, for her inspiring Foreword to the issue.

From strangers to classmates to board colleagues, our team's unique personalities blended together over the course of two semesters to form a supportive and passionate synergy. Our drive to promote this artistic endeavor of student-led creativity saw a massive return of 133 total submissions to review and weigh with the help of twenty-five volunteer readers. Each piece underwent at least three rounds of reading with the help of those dedicated readers, before votes were confirmed and then finalized. The thirty-seven accepted pieces then went through three or more rounds of editing and proofreading before reaching publication.

To everyone who offered their art for consideration in this issue, thank you. We are enormously grateful for every submission entrusted to us, whether it made it to publication or not. Thank you for sharing with us your voices, cultures, hopes, hurts, sorrows, and dreams. It has been an honour to learn and explore art together with all of you.

We look forward to passing the torch to a new student board who will oversee the next issue of *Louden Singletree*, providing another platform for artists to find their way in the world.

—The 2024 *Louden Singletree* Editorial Board

Louden Singletree acknowledges that it is located on the unceded and traditional Stó:lō territories.

JULIA DOVEY

Foreword

On November 26, 2013, at eleven-ish in the morning, a stapled sheaf of papers was slapped before me on a desk. On the front page was a simple handwritten sentence. And that sentence, as simple as it was, changed the course of my literary life.

Whenever I talk to new writers, their questions often (very often) revolve around the concept of “can I?”

Can I do this?

Can my story be this way?

Can I break this rule?

Why? Because new writers, when showing their work to another human for the first time, are nervous. They’ve dipped their pens into old ink and are worried about writing the wrong thing with it. There are no rules in writing—that’s what the greats tout. *Awesome*, we say. *Thanks*. But the trouble, we know, with having “no rules” is that the unspoken ones (which exist, always) are so much harder to escape from. The rules are invisible until broken, and now we look silly. Foolish. Bad. Untalented. Et cetera. (Not *ex etera*. Rule: broken.)

And too many broken rules, we know, might result in the worst thing in the writing world.

Rejection.

It might be a critic’s red pen, or the “unfortunately” in an email, or the dreadful family member response of “it’s cute” after the earnest “what do you think?” Rejection has countless forms, and the double-edged sword of keen writerly observation skills lets us identify every form with mortifying ease.

Unfortunately (!) rejection in writing is as unavoidable as rain in Abbotsford. Whether it's a friend's "I liked it...but..." or an agent's boilerplate return email wishing you the "best of luck in your writing endeavors," writers will face rejection again, and again, and again.

And it might make you want to give up. To delete your overpriced Word subscription, to pour your pens dramatically into a recycling bin and never write another sentence. But the truth is, rejection is only the *second* worst thing to happen to a writer. The first, of course, is letting rejection stop you from writing altogether.

The difference between an unpublished writer and a published writer isn't talent—it's the height of the rejection letter pile. The unpublished use theirs to de-wobble a table. The published use theirs *as* a table. Because it's not about stopping after one story fails. It's saying "okay, fine...what about this?" over, and over, and over, until the world says, finally, those beautiful words: "Ugh. Fine."

In the last few years, I've had three novels published, taught writing workshops, and worked as UFV's Writer in Residence. I've had the pleasure of reading the work of students, staff, and alumni, and this magazine showcases UFV's literary artistry in a nutshell. In it, you'll find stories of delicate lessons, desperation for the simple, fear of the unknown, and the calming power of yellow flowers. And I commend those writers who decided not to hide their candle under a bushel, to instead say, "Yeah, I can, actually," and to send in the work you'll read today.

I know being published in magazines like this can be lifechanging. Because my own literary journey indeed started with that simple sentence scrawled by a professor on the first play I ever wrote:

Format it and submit it for publication to Louden Singletree.

—*Julia Dovey*, 2024 UFV Writer in Residence

Polyvagal

Despite producing this piece in 2021, it remains a work that I still think about and resonate with. I believe this is due in large part to it primarily being an expression of exhaustion, something we all feel at different points in our lives. I was tired, physically, and mentally drained by the constant movement in my life. Between working four days a week, adjusting to life as a full-time student, attempting to maintain a social life, and trying to stay financially afloat, it felt like I rarely had time to turn my brain off. I was always worrying about a new problem and how to solve it.

While I am not particularly well versed in either neuroscience or psychology, during the conceptual phase of the piece I was inspired by the notion of biological fight or flight responses, especially their use in modern times. These functions are very helpful in the right setting—our ancestors likely would have benefited from these while being chased by large predators, and we ourselves might use this heightened awareness and action to avoid a careless driver. However, there are certain traits of contemporary life that seem to strain the effects of these responses. You can't run from rent, you can't fight deadlines—at least not in the same way. We might perceive a sense of danger from these problems, but this defensive state doesn't necessarily go away in the same way it would for more literal issues, leading to all sorts of stress and anxiety.

I wanted to visualize the compounding nature of stress and fatigue by utilizing a mixed-media approach to create different textures and values, as well as play on the concept of pareidolia in the main subject of the work. Pareidolia describes the tendency to interpret meaningful images out of random or ambiguous visual patterns, like seeing faces in random objects, or making out images in a Rorschach inkblot test. To me, the inclusion of such a concept both plays off the idea of exhaustion—one might mistake what they are seeing in a tired state—and emphasizes it through the dual subject matter.



SAVANNAH BURROWS

If Only Everything Was Everlasting

June sets in,
my mum opens the blinds,
letting the light in—and suddenly
she’s only nearing thirty again,
leaving the doors to the balcony open
as she sits there, watering her pansies.
“These are my favourite, they last forever,”
she reveals.

I long to lie on the porch of
our old apartment, to run my tongue
along a row of baby teeth once more.
To swirl it in circles inside the gaping hole
of the first one to fall,
to have that be the only thing
I’m capable of missing.

ABIGAIL WHEELER

It's a Never-Ending Universe

Above, stars appear to twinkle in the dark sky
The world is vast, he says, but the universe is never-ending
It scares me, I say, to think of it that way
Too many people to count, too many things to happen, but never enough time

The world is vast, he had said, and the universe never-ending
So I wonder where he went, after he left his body behind
There were too many people, too many possibilities, but never enough time
And now I sit here alone, looking up at the night sky

I do often wonder where he went after leaving his body behind
I don't believe that the essence of him went out of existence
I search for him when I sit alone, watching the night sky
Hoping that when it's my turn, we will somehow meet again

I know that the essence of him is still out there somewhere
It has to be somewhere in this never-ending universe
I know when it's my turn, I will find him again
For now, I look up at the twinkling stars in the dark sky

AVERY DOW-KENNY

Love, Vincent

27 July 1890

*I set my easel against the haystack
in the countryside near Auvers.*

*Out here there is no one
to put my work and I to shame,*

*there is only the wheat and
the sun and me,*

*both as yellow as the paint
I forced down my throat*

*last year, not necessarily to
die, but to be happier*

*similarly to my left ear,
cut to try and go deaf*

*to the cruel words spat at me
daily; endlessly.*

*I wish they would only take me
as I am,*

*but I am shamed and
shunned.*

*So I take out my tools where I
stand in the countryside near Auwers:*

*paint, paintbrushes, canvas, and
a pistol*

*for I have put too much of myself
in my work that I have*

*lost my mind
in the process.*

*I will get my mind back this way,
the way I want to,*

*in a field
of wheat,*

*in the countryside
near Auwers.*

*And I'll hobble home
with my gut in my hands*

*and I'll die two days later
before I can tell Theo*

*I want sunflowers to grow
over my grave.*

~ Love, Vincent

BONNEE DULLAARD

Jane

*Husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies.
He who loves his wife loves himself.
After all, no one ever hated their own body,
But they feed and care for their body.
—Ephesians 5:28-29 (NIV)*

Only twenty-one, Jane strides down the aisle
through the standing, parting sea of smiles,
pure and like a queen. We wait
for the veil to lift. We see
His face, his everlasting grace,
and love revealed in sacrifice.
Her stainless soul shows the price
has been paid; she is a grateful bride
offering her hand. For like Christ,
Husbands ought to love their wives

As their own bodies.
The pastor reads from Genesis,
and no one speaks. We are held by peace
for peace is what they teach in the pulpit—
wild women hearts might wail at the moon
for a room of their own, but the bells toll
above the pews and now, the bride is taken.
We wave her home—she is gone. She is
the bone of his bones, the flesh of his flesh
For he who loves his wife loves himself.

Doe-eyed Jane had seen happy couples
look like moulded wedding toppers,
all glazed and frosted, so she wailed
when he changed behind peaceful walls
and closed shutters—he tore at her body.
But she woke up Godly.
She polished, made the suffering shine holy,
he asked for respect, and Jane turned frosty,
glazed over, became his mock-up copy
Because no one ever hated their own body.

And when the pastor got involved,
he had the husband point to where it hurts
on his body. He pointed at her.
So the pastor told Jane to play the nurse,
to follow the script, and submit while
the husband poured the pain from his body
till she repented. And Jane Doe tended
to his needs. She cooked, she cleaned,
and faded into the margins of the church's body,
Feeding and caring for someone else.

NOAH JOHNSON

Eye to I

Aphrodite eyes, pupils I have fallen towards.
Lost in your mind, that is lost within mine.
Fully seen yet separated worlds.
Emerald-green iris, living planet with changing tides
painting new colours:
fern, olive, sage, basil, juniper, pine.
All intertwined. Your eyes' phases calm me,
balanced shape with softened edges.
Blinks and winks that cause celebrational thunder,
vibrations that inspire
green aventurine's melodic glow.
Clear lens, a mirage of my past selves
like the fountain of youth.
A better childhood stored in your cornea,
one not damaged by reading social cues in the dark.

Planet of Venus, I have become your moon!
You highlight my many phases,
let me move you with my gravity.
Orbit you as you surround me, fully seen.
Calming waves of evergreen,
sweep me into your ever-growing vast beauty.
I see the scenery, painters envy knowing such extravagance exists.
Endless galaxies circulated through a priceless lens.
Open windows lose all frames of context
when I study life's opportunities through your eyes.
My smile wrinkles grow like ripples, blooming in your presence.
Your kind words anchor my drifting world, a safe space to park my head
while our inner children shine like stars
reflected within our hazel green galaxy.
A play date within constellations
Libra to Virgo
Eye to I.

KELSEY ROBSON

My Body Is Not Mine Anymore

I do not think of you, exactly.

My body has words with your ghost sometimes.

I lie and say no, or I lie and say yes.

We are never upright when the truth is spoken.

—“In The Spring of No Letters” by Merlene Cookshaw

Everything starts to seem okay, until suddenly it's not.

The moments come back to me abstractly.

Although it's only you I have to blame for the thought,

I do not think of you, exactly.

I do okay with most sunrises,

take advantage of the false confidence that comes in the daytime.

But when the moon exercises,

my body has words with your ghost sometimes,

things I wish I would've had the bravery to do or say.

I start to think I've made progress,

until he asks me, “If we try, will you be okay?”

I lie and say no, or I lie and say yes.

No matter how convincingly I think I've hidden being broken,

we are never upright when the truth is spoken.

CINDY CASTRO

Mazapánes and Motherhood

She put her pen down and got up from the kitchen table to hand me a book stained by the years of motherhood love. “When we’re gone, I expect you to keep our traditions alive. This has everything you’ll need to know.”

Rewind.

I don’t remember much about being a child, but my mother tells me that when I was three, I would sneak up to the kitchen table in our old apartment searching for food. She watched me stand up on my tiptoes and reach my hands over the kitchen table to feel around for the avocado. She tells me that she started cutting up an extra one as soon as I dipped my grimy baby hands in the bowl of mashed avocado. She wanted me to have enough. The message that I wanted more was smeared avocado all over my face, hair, and hands, plus a bit on the edge of the table from when I grabbed the wood for stability before running away.

Ever since that day, I was a good eater. Except for that one time I was five, and I became a magician.

“Mom, if you put food in my mouth, I will make it disappear. Then I will come back for another bite!” I said in my small voice. Everyone looked at each other, unsure...but willing.

“Here comes the airplane! Brrr-brrrr-brrr, yum!” I pulled the long tablecloth over my head and snuck under the table. I spat everything out and waited for one minute to give the impression that I had chewed everything. Then I revealed myself from under the tablecloth and opened my mouth to show everyone that it was empty. We did this a couple times, and my family kept giving me bites of food because they were convinced that was the only way I was going to finish my meal.

At cleanup time, I was swinging my feet while I sat at the table when my older sister, Lizzie, looked below and yelled, “Ewww! Mom! There’s a pile of chewed

up food underneath the table!” I couldn’t help but give the evil little-girl giggle. My brother and sister were disgusted, but they couldn’t help but laugh at my magic trick. Lord knows they weren’t gonna clean it. My parents were upset that I wasted a whole meal, but when we look back on it, we can agree that I outsmarted them as a five year old. As my mother found out, if you don’t see your child swallow their food, you’re gonna find it somewhere else later.

Speaking of finding food in secret places, one of my father’s favourite sweet dessert snacks was a small, dense, round circle called mazapán. The colour of the treat is beige or cream, with little flecks of chunkier nut pieces that surprise you. The wrapper is crinkly, thin, made of easily rippable plastic, and very fragile. The mazapán inside is the reward, which is practically soundless when it crumbles apart into a sweet yet dense powder. It smells specifically of peanuts, or almond nuts, and it coats your mouth as soon as it melts on your tongue. It’s a small, delicate item that should be held with care; any sudden movements and it will fall apart.

My father always has a box of these in his special hiding places. They’re sacred to him, because they’re hard to find in Canada. So, when I was young, I remember finding his stash. I opened the cabinet, and it was like opening a glowing treasure chest filled with jewellery and gold coins. They’re packed in a rectangular, bright yellow box with a red rose and the words “de la rosa” printed on the top. I had to close it immediately. It felt immoral to know where they were. I felt like I had just sinned. But then I remembered the taste of when I had one in Mexico. So, I took one. I remember watching my father open one before, and he was always so delicate. I didn’t know his big pianist hands were capable of such precision. I broke it, obviously, and it crumbled everywhere. My mom found me upset and scared with mazapán crumbs all over my lap and on the floor. So, she said she would eat that one, and she taught me how to open a new one.

My parents continue to teach me their recipes. We cook together and we try new things outside of our comfort zone. They’ve taught me everything I know now when it comes to the kitchen. For example, my dad showed me how to make his signature Chiles en Vinagre recipe that was passed down from my great abuela, Mamaíta Dolores. When my mom and I travelled to Mexico to visit her family, I noticed the tastes in Mexico are so much bolder than they are in Canada. It felt like a luxury to taste the flavours that were born in the land of my roots.

Most days, we'll eat really basic items like tortillas and beans for breakfast. Some may consider those ingredients inferior or lower class, but as my family always says, "No somos ricos!"

How lovely it is to share your culture's passion with your children, and how even more lovely it is to share the love of food, knowing full well it's not the most lavish, but still brings smiles around the dinner table. Treat the mazapán like you would your mother and her mother before her in old age. She's fragile, she's delicate, but densely packed with love. Unwrap her gentle stories, and cherish the little nugget-flecks of wisdom within.

As I pondered the significance of preserving these recipes, I realized that I held a responsibility. It's my responsibility to carry these recipes with me into the future. A responsibility to share them with my own children. A responsibility to ensure the flavours and aromas that defined my upbringing continue to live on. A responsibility to practise the recipes; to master them. While it feels like a heavy weight to carry, it becomes lighter knowing the professionals are the ones who raised me. At the same time, I realized that the journey isn't only about mastering recipes, but it's also about preserving the culture in all forms, beyond food. There are some things from my culture that I have yet to try. Like putting up an ofrenda for a loved one on Día de los Muertos—where we adorn it with their favourite foods, belongings, and marigold petals. Or making tamales from scratch because I've only ever had fresh ones in Mexico made by my tías.

Let's not forget about the mazapán. It's so important to treat the women and men who came before us like a mazapán with the same care, or more. Like a mazapán, the recipes, memories, and stories within my own family serve as a reminder that even the most delicate aspects of our heritage are worth preserving. Not only that, but the thin, crinkly wrapper holds more than a reward; it holds my dad's memorized recipes, traditions and stories hidden away in a cabinet waiting to be told. The mazapán is more than a dense, fragile, sweet peanut treat; it's a metaphor for the love and culture that binds our family together, just like it takes time and patience to bind the ingredients of pre-baked conchas.

As I stand in the kitchen, an inventory of our culture, traditions, and the spirit of those who came before, I make a promise to myself: the recipes of my culture will not only survive, but they will thrive. They will continue to evolve with each new chapter of my mother's life, my own life, and my future children's lives.

The kitchen is where I accepted the recipe book with two hands like I accepted my first mazapán-unwrapping lesson. The kitchen is where I realized I've been a student the whole time. But now, this is where I become the teacher; this is where I teach you how to open a mazapán.

KELSEY ROBSON

Tomorrow?

I created this photogram with somebody I've known since childhood as inspiration, who has struggled with addiction for many years. This person, a friend, has always been someone that everyone looks forward to being around for his sense of humour, smile, and kindness. Since entering our teenage years, my friend has been unable to find a healthy relationship with substances. The people around him have watched his resilience slowly fade as his addiction has claimed a stronger hold on him. When you love someone who is struggling with addiction it can be hard to watch the trail of self-destruction play out when the result seems so evident to you, but they don't see it the same way. Watching someone you've known almost your whole life flirt with death so closely has a heavy effect on your mind, and I found myself with the desire to create something to express my emotions as well as the result that is laid out in front of him if he continues on the same path he is currently on.



ERIC BATEMAN

Finding Addiction

A way inward, the guide will suggest,
“Away from all of this.”
Simple markings left abreast the entrance
from the people before.
No warnings to the naïve.

Wander in, estranged soul!
Find warmer narrows, and peaceful holes.
The walls will sing:
fill emptiness, forgive solitude and
twist memory!

For the way inward is fast.
Cloying despite your vast histories and
singular despite such storied past.
Everything will slip softly passed

until,
your claws begin to drip in its heat. And ears repeal at song.
Etching to grant scant reprieve,
scratchings onto same wall,
simple markings no one will follow:

“Away from all this.”

ZEKE MORALES

The Ceiling

A ceiling lamp fizzles away,
Clouds beneath eroded cracks swiftly fray.
Unicorns; a canary of bright light
World peace; dreams we long for late at night.

A carcass dances away death,
Rotting bones comparable to Macbeth.
Royalty; crown under overgrown grass.
Yesterday; dust beneath Queen Anne's mast.

The ceiling crumbles away last,
Revealing the terrors that lay ahead.
Today; yin and yang dance upon a thread,
Hope; a wish upon a star good as dead.

Hanging as if on the gallows,
A hand reaches down, returning the pieces.
Bulb twisting into socket, not a sound.

Heaven shines down begging for its promised time,
Yet a hell remains of the mind:

"I can't be that kind, I'm far from fine—"

"I'm as vile as all of sin combined."

Heaven shimmers through the cracks of the ceiling,
Few poor souls seeing,
Until everything's gone, the blood of believers congealing.
Just beyond the ceiling.

ANNABEL BOT

Mouse

I write Mouse into being,
grey and *black* and *brown* and
white and *soft* and *dense* and *short-*
furred woven into his tiny
body. Nose made of *tiny*, *pink*, *tapered*,
I write it some legs of *short*, *four-toed*,
sharp-clawed, and the beast skitters to life
off my paper. Tail of *hairless*, *long*, *pink* whips
across the floor in its wake, ears of *round*, *large*, *cute*
twisting with curiosity.

I watch the words assemble themselves, watch
Mouse scramble for escape, and my cat
wakes from the bed, gives chase with
real body, no words, for after all,
reality must set in at some time.
I watch this game of cat-and-mouse, so aptly
named, without much thought, Mouse
is simply words, after all. The cat is real, and it is
instinct. Who am I to deny these
beasts of nature?

My cat catches Mouse, because of course he does, it is what he was made to do. His paw, made of fur and reality, smashes poor Mouse to the floor, pins it there, until the words fall apart, *grey* and *black* and *white* and *brown* scatter across the floor. He then retreats, bored, and I scoop the words into my hands, attempt to reassemble the creature I created, the monster to my Frankenstein.

Words are finicky, and Mouse is stubborn, so I piece and piece until finally, *soft* and *dense* and *short-furred* sits in my hand, nose built of *tiny, pink, tapered* sniffing my palm, tail of *hairless* and *long* sweeping my skin. Mouse stares at me from eyes made of *black, shiny, little*. I wonder if it calls me Mother or God. I stroke between ears of *round, large, cute* with a finger and release Mouse back onto my paper.

MORGAN KING

Uhtceare

I awed at the stars, tiny flickering dots poked into a black expanse, cloudless besides my own breath. My untrained eyes searched for constellations I did not know, and answers that were not there. In the mind of a child, such wonders are whatever one is told. If they're told the dots are massive, far away, flaming balls, just like our sun, they will believe it. If they are told they are the maps of the gods, a sprawling expanse laid out in a pattern that mortal minds cannot comprehend, they will believe. To me, they were living beings: nocturnal creatures who called that darkness home. The moon was the brightest and greatest of them all. The mother of all stars. I had no understanding of the many errors in that belief, or why something as grand as the moon couldn't be called a star. That particular story came from my brother. I remember it still, because it was the first one he told me, and it was the only one that didn't give me nightmares. Only two months later was the first time I heard the story of the mountain travellers.

It was a large campfire that night. When Dad started fires, he never had any patience, so he would use gas. He would say that our cottage time was short, so why bother wasting any of it. With nearly half a tree to burn, the fire felt like it was twenty feet high when it started but fell to just a couple feet within minutes. My brother Freddy and my parents talked for a long time about things I didn't understand or didn't care about. All through their wild, inane speeches, I was reclined in a special cushioned chair; it could go entirely flat, so it was perfect for getting a full view of the sky people.

"How 'bout a story?" I shot up at my dad's words. I'd been waiting for him to say that. Every fire we would get a story, and of course, they were always true. While I had shot up, Freddy chose to lie back, entirely disinterested in Dad's "boring" stories. Mom had heard all of Dad's stories but smiled and watched my excitement. Dad leaned closer to the fire. "It was two-hundred years ago, on a mountain not far from home. Some travelling bunch were making their way through the valley, looking for nice spots to settle. Whenever they stopped for the night, there seemed to be an unnatural chill that would shock them awake. It was always gone faster than it arrived, but those travellers knew to heed the

warnings of the spirits.” Dad took his poking stick and stabbed the fire. Hundreds of tiny embers whirled up, skittering, dragged along by the rising smoke.

“They slept there but carried on the next morning. Each night was the same, and the travellers grew weary. Was the whole valley cursed? Maybe their entire venture to that place was a mistake? As their resolve dwindled, so did their supplies. They tried to hunt, but there were no deer. Bushes kept no berries, and the ground held no tracks. They were becoming hungry and lost in those mountains. I’ll tell you, those travellers were expert trackers, the best, but the longer they lingered in the valley the more their minds clouded. Eventually their minds were so murky, they lost reason. So, one night, the strongest of the travellers plucked up a rock,” he said, grabbing the bag of marshmallows. He stood and crept around the fire saying, “Snuck up to the loudest snorer in the group” —by then, Freddy knew what dad was doing, and was tensing, guarding his face— “and smacked down! Once!” One marshmallow flung off into the dark as Dad smacked Freddy with the bag. “Twice! Three times!”

“Screw off!” Freddy growled. Dad circled further around, closer to me. I took cover, not wanting to be smacked by marshmallows like Freddy.

“Then, he grabbed his sharpest knife” —he chopped his hand down on my shoulder —“and sliced up some meat. Ooo, the traveller ate well.” He smacked his lips next to my ear and I flailed. “Ate till he was full. That night, there was no chill. The spirits didn’t visit the travellers that night. The other travellers weren’t even shocked when they woke the next morning. They were jealous they didn’t get the best parts. They dug right in, had themselves a juicy breakfast. Two nights fell, as did two more travellers. The three of them left were content, and so the third night came, their bellies full. That night, there came another chill, but it was different this time. They’d felt the warnings of the spirits and knew this was not them. This felt angry.” Dad sat back down in his chair and took a serious and dark tone.

“There was a distant sound of something moving. Stepping heavily, slowly through the mist, was the first creature they’d seen in the valley. They were excited at first, but it was no deer. It peered between the trees, pale white eyes under spiked antlers. The Wendigo.”

“Wendigo?” I breathed.

“An evil beast, with the skinless head of a deer, hunched forward on two legs, with spiked teeth and two vicious clawed hands. It stared at the travellers, and

they felt its hate. For all who turn to cannibalism in the Wendigo's mountains meet its horrible gaze. It dashed at them, and they were too slow to flee. That night, the Wendigo ate its fill, and from the smashed remains of the travellers, three more great beasts rose. Three more Wendigos to torment the night, ever-stalking the valley, searching...for another night's meal."

"Ooo," Mom cooed to me. "Scary, right?"

I nodded, completely lost for words.

"You're terrible parents." Freddy laughed.

"Ah, you're no better," Dad cracked back, throwing a marshmallow at him.

"What's cannibalism?" I asked, already guessing what it meant.

"Erm, well, it's something bad people do," Dad mumbled, grabbing another marshmallow to roast.

"Cannibalism is when you eat your own kind," Freddy droned. "If he pisses himself tonight, I'm sleeping in the car."

Dreams of antlers and people trying to eat me plagued me for two nights. Finally, it was time to go home. The three-hour drive seemed to go quick. The mountains we drove through were enough to let my imagination carry itself. When we got back to town, we stopped at the grocery store, since we usually ran out of food with how long we would stay at the cottage.

"Do you guys want to come in or stay in here?" Mom asked.

"I'm fine here," Freddy sighed.

"I'm fine," I added.

Mom looked at Freddy sternly. "Watch him."

Freddy threw up his hands. "Where's he gonna go?" Mom rolled her eyes and left. I was only able to sit for a few minutes before feeling the need to pester Freddy.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"Texting. A week without service or Wi-Fi and people think you're dead."

"Don't they know we have a cottage?"

"Oh my God, can you leave me alone? Be quiet."

I sat for another minute. "Wendigos aren't real, right?"

"Oh, they're real, and they're gonna eat you tonight if you don't stop talking."

"Why would they eat me? I thought they only ate cannibals?"

Freddy's lips tightened and he smacked his phone on his forehead. "Well,

because you are a cannibal, obviously.”

“What?”

“Ya. Remember? Cannibals eat their own kind, and I’ve seen you eat plenty of chicken. Now shut up, please.”

My stomach turned. *Eating chicken makes you a cannibal? Why didn’t anyone say anything before?* A small panic attack later, Mom and Dad came back with groceries.

“Can you help us with this?” Mom asked. Freddy didn’t move, but I didn’t hesitate to jump out. They had a full cart, and a pleasant scent carried from the bags. My curiosity carried me to the smell. To my dismay, I found two pre-grilled, whole chickens.

I refused to eat the chicken. Mom was mad, and Freddy made fun of me, but I didn’t budge. Luckily, they did a big shop, so there was a lot more to eat than just chicken.

That night, something woke me. I wondered if the spirits had visited me in the middle of the night, warning me of danger. I stared at the plastic glow-in-the-dark stars on my ceiling for what felt like hours, trying to get the image of cannibals and Wendigos out of my head. The anticipation forced me up. I peeked out my bedroom door. I could still hear the TV on downstairs. Freddy always stayed up late. So unfair. I sat next to my closet as I waited for Freddy to go to bed, one foot pushed against the door to keep from anything bursting out.

I simply couldn’t put up with monsters in the woods. I knew I had to do something, and I had a plan. It was over an hour, and I was starting to get tired again, but I finally heard him go back to his room. I crept out, every footstep precise. The stairs were the hardest part, since they were the creakiest area of the house. Down I went, slowly, eyes fixed on Freddy’s door. I could hear some video being played inside his room which I hoped would help. I made it downstairs.

The kitchen was dark. I didn’t want to risk turning on any lights, but I had no choice when it came to the fridge. I slowly pried its door open, and the light shone automatically, flooding light around me. I quickly grabbed the remaining chicken that we were saving for tomorrow and closed the door. I waited. No reaction from upstairs. I grabbed my shoes, and snuck out the back door, container of chicken in hand. It was cold without a jacket, and I hadn’t changed out of my pyjamas.

The moon was bright. As I stepped onto the wet grass, she seemed to

follow me. I watched her in the sky, trailing my movement. The star people were hidden, so she was my only companion. Still, how could one not be confident when under the eye of the queen of the sky?

At the end of our backyard there was a wooden fence with one ten-foot tall, open gateway. Beyond that, there was the forest. The trees there seemed taller than normal ones. At least a hundred feet high, carrying an imposing grandeur that was hard to look away from. I stepped closer. I wasn't allowed beyond the gate, even during the day. I stood at the threshold, staring at the dark trees and bushes. The ground was so thick with plant life that you could barely see fifteen feet.

I took one step, crossing that barrier for the first time. My breath escaped me in a cloud. *Is it normally this cold?*

I pushed farther into the forest. I wasn't sure how far I had to go in. Eventually, I looked back and couldn't see any sign of the gate or the house. I looked up and couldn't find the moon between the trees. *Can she still see me?* I stood still and listened, confidence lost with the moon, worried something might jump out suddenly.

Crack.

My head shot forward. There was something ahead of me. It sounded big. Bigger than me, I knew. I strained my eyes to catch a glimpse and saw nothing through the veil of the forest. There was a shift, and I saw movement to the branches.

Not branches, I realized. Antlers.

I dropped the chicken, my sacrifice to the Wendigo. I simply hoped that all it would take was an offering of food it might like, and it would leave us alone. Maybe I was right. The only thing that seemed to chase me was the moon, as I ran back to safety.

The spirits didn't come again that night, or any night after.

GERRY EGGERT

The Modern Poet

Modern poets have no fucking shame,
they pollute their scrolls to demonstrate
they are hip and free of constraints,
appealing to everchanging generations,
turning the romantic traditions and styles
of the past to ashes, shredding culture.

Let the four-letter words rain, drown the
discipline of grammar and punctuation,
there is no umbrella,
bury tradition and form,
get the poem read,
sold.

I shod pley the gamme I shal trew oot spilling,
oor perhaps nxt rite a fookin poom wit numbers insted of words!

No, I shan't!

XAVIER IBRAHEEM

Cedars, Pines, and Print

Whispers in the wind gusting
by trees standing, or stumps resting.
Branches drawing beneath their sky blue,
a painted picture that sores my eyes to look at.

Beyond the windows, streets and hills,
I see a thousand bark faces:
Each of them chiselled with the skills
of a fine artist, but what I would bargain
for a delicate one who erases
the wrinkles and burdens
from the pines of my branches.

Cut me down and count my rings,
gaze upon all the better things
that you could've harvested instead,
alas, here I lay forlorn and dead.
Cut down by the careless conversation
continued by asking vacant question,
after vacant question, I lay silent.

Branches still and rings rotten,
I close my eyes once more
attempting to rid the downtrodden
dripping and dried sap gore.

Adhering to the hands of apathy,
or maybe disgust that something so vile
would project beyond the organ cacophony
that houses the source of buried anguish
leading a flourish
for dead branches, running still.

Earth and animal care not for stagnant
beings and creatures unwilling
to sing harmony above a rose wilting
under the decay of sway made repugnant
by the aversion to all the other trees.

I hate all of you, sway further,
and forget I ever laid roots
in this town, and remember
only the name and picture on the newspaper
among all the other faces that no one will remember,
except at three in the morning,
when you remind yourself
where's nothing left of me,
but a stump.

PIPER HORNALL

Home





JORJA JOHNS

To Be or Not to Be: Motherhood Pt. 2

Make me a mother and let me be better than mine ever was,
I see babies on the daily and I ache:

I want one I want one I want one.

Is my desperation out of love or desire,
do I want to make the world a better place or do I just want to prove that I can?

I wonder back to when I was nothing but a clump of cells,
was I an attempt at saving a family which did not exist?

I want a family and I do I promise,
I promise I promise I promise.

My mother tells me I'm hard to love,
she doesn't tell me to be cruel but rather to prepare me for the heartbreaks I
will endure.

Mothers do know best after all
and maybe that's why I want to be one,
I have always had a craving for knowledge,
an innate desire to know, to know the reasons for everything which exists.
Or maybe that desire is what begs the question here:
Why do I yearn to fill my womb so young?

A woman is born with all the eggs she will ever carry,
my mother has carried my unborn children the same way my grandmother
carried me,
the same way I will one day hold the future in the abyss that is inside me.

I am twenty now but I have been in this world since 1972,
my mother since 1935.
There was once five months in which we all inhabited the same body,
five months where the love was unconditional.

CARLY FLEMING

Prinsengracht 263

Buildings, all ironed and pressed, in a row.
Packed so tightly, causing them to adapt,
to grow upwards, to stretch and find space.
As if they are malleable, in a perpetual
state of holding their breath.

Windows, so many windows.
A feigned transparency that gives
an unassuming, innocent look,
the illusion of honesty.
The cracks of whose panes
I will soon learn to breathe through,
just to get a whisper of fresh air.

We arrive prematurely.
Our furniture and possessions meet us there,
out of place, dishevelled by dissonant memories.
Eight souls hiding in plain sight.
Thin walls, the only thing that separates us from the outside.
The pulsing of my blood feels like enough to give me away.

While outside,
more than bullets are
entering chambers,
and numerous bodies
are clambering into trains.

I have to wonder why they're trying to kill me.
Though I imagine, many have had these same
thoughts before.

I wonder what conclusion they came to.
What is it that I may be guilty of?

I went to school,
did my homework,
just like all the other children.
Rode on bicycles
with boy friends,
ate ice cream
on hot summer days.
Played tennis,
went to films,
dreamed of celebrities,
tried new hairstyles,
made friends,
aged.

I've shared so many normal
human experiences.
Does it mean that I have to share
this one too?
It's hard to imagine death,
while my heart beats strong, and
my lungs don't quit.
I find,

that I am very much alive.

I find too,
that this is the reason
why they think I must
die.

VIVECA BRAATEN

The Othello Virus

I

Venice Beach, L.A., California, U.S.A.

Sirens sing, lights pulsating red and blue
from the menacing police cruiser.
Iago and his partner, Roderigo,
race to a riot, a crowd
of BLM protestors marching
for their right to live.

A scene of chaos, they crash
into the front of the makeshift police barricade,
fluorescent orange cones scattering.
“Get weapons,”¹ Iago smirks, sidelong,
a Benelli shotgun appearing in his hands, a miraculous lethality.
Set up in a flood of effervescent patriotic colour,
the officers stand behind shields and sight
dangerously into the blurred faces, strange bodies.

Iago spots
a fair face, like marbled Greek statuary,
surfacing, in a sea of figures, a familiarity, sweet Desdemona.
Holding hands firmly with a man,
flesh dark as an onyx,
a man Iago knew well,
the very one who’d had an affair with his wife,
so, he thought.

¹William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Othello: The Moor of Venice*, eds. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine (Washington: Folger Shakespeare Library, 2005), 1.1.204.

“Call up her father,² Sheriff Brabantio.”
Roderigo fishes the phone from the depths of his pocket,
handing it off to Iago like it was set to detonate.

The line trills faintly,
over shouts and screams,
a gruff answer, “Hello?”
“Sir, it’s Detective Iago.
Your daughter is here,
rioting...with a Moor.

His blackness billows over my white privilege,”
Iago yells incredulously into the speaker. “A Moorish plague contaminating
my freedoms, bewitching our women, taking our jobs,
wafting through my superiority complex.”
Iago in suit of navy, a brooch of glimmering gold,
a belt of glittering gunmetal.

“Othello swooped in, clasping an innocent heart
between talons. Desdemona unknowingly becoming
diced in the grip of his claws, the green-eyed monster.³
Could be dangerous, abusive,
taking advantage of her as we speak,
completely dominating, letting him use her to
make the beast with two backs.”⁴

Brabantio froths,
“Apprehend her and the Moor!”⁵

²Shakespeare, 1.1.74.

³Shakespeare, 3.3.166.

⁴Shakespeare, 1.1.130-131.

⁵Shakespeare, 1.1.200.

II Cypress Park, L.A., California, U.S.A.

The cops follow them to the Park,
unable to push back the rising tide on the Beach.

Othello grips flimsy construction paper,
hand-painted in green, block letters,
*I didn't poison this young maid's affections.*⁶

An emboldened black arrow
pointing to his wife Desdemona's fair face
shimmering in the severe summer sunlight.

Othello shouts into a horde of blue
uniforms, flashing shields refracting
beams into the sweating crowd.

"Hear my black vengeance,"⁷
he roars.

Iago grabs his body as it hits the wall of plexiglass,
twisting and slamming Othello into the simmering concrete below.

Desdemona screams,
pink nails slicing through every obstacle.
"Get her," Iago yells.

Roderigo moves towards her, taser pulled from his belt,
electricity hidden in the yellow gun; he pulls the trigger.

A thin white man jumps between,
catching the electric spokes with his stomach.

"Oh my God, Cassio!"

Desdemona reaches down to cradle his head in her lap,
a statuesque image, like a Pietà.

"Get on the ground, both of you."
She drops, hands outspread.

⁶Shakespeare, 1.3.131.

⁷Shakespeare, 3.3.507.

Handcuffs are pulled, sharp-tongued epithets thrown,
soon locked in cruisers' cages.

III

Iago looks in his rear-view mirror, seething
at the thicklips⁸ contained.
An inner monologue runs rampant with harsh thoughts.
*Women are devils in the household,
complaining, squawking, irritating
housemaids. Only worthy for a good lay.*
But
*I want a bite of sweet, scrumptious Desdemona,
a piece of the Moor's young wife,
as he tasted mine,
that whore⁹ Emilia.*
To show the violent black man, Iago plots
Othello's potential jealousy,
his own creation.
Frame him for a crime everyone expects him to commit.

IV

LAPD Interrogation Room, L.A., California, U.S.A.

Othello leans on the plastic chair, front legs rearing
against the table, his hands lassoed to the centre, legs chained together.

Detective Iago walks into the room,
slamming the door, an expression of ice frozen onto his face.
He sits down across from Othello,
dropping an empty manila folder between them.
"It's odd that you don't have a record;
no run-ins with the police?"

⁸Shakespeare 1.1.68.

⁹Shakespeare 4.2.83.

Othello shakes his head. “Only in traffic stops.
I always seem to be the lucky one to be searched.”

“Lucky you.” Iago smiles.
He glances down to see a bright gold band on Othello’s finger.
“It would be a shame to ruin such a good record.”
Iago’s mouth narrows, becoming the slim muzzle of a shotgun
firing rapid questions like bullets into Othello.

“So, whose idea was it really to go out and riot today?
Your wife seems awfully close to that skinny white kid,”
Iago suggests knowingly.
“She went to him as soon as he fell, left you in the dust?
Was it their idea to go against the police today?
Did she put you up to this, acting wildly for her?”

“Are you crazy? What the hell are you talking about?”
The whites of Othello’s eyes shine,
a deer under the room’s fluorescent lights.
His stomach likely playing jump rope with his intestine,
sweat coats his lip.

“You look nervous, Othello.”

“Yeah, I’m nervous about being thrown in prison.
It was all of us, equally deciding to fight
for what is inherently right,
Cassio came as a friend, an ally, a brother,
Desdemona cares for him as I do.
I’ll see before I doubt.¹⁰
We were lawfully protesting against injustice;
if anyone’s at fault, it’s you.”

¹⁰Shakespeare, 3.3.221.

Iago scowls, the conversation not going as he had imagined.

“That’s not what they’re saying,
they team together, throwing you under the bus,
claim you responsible for taking them there,
claim you turned wild and attacked the innocent officers
of your own volition.”

“My life upon her faith,”¹¹
Othello replies, his brows scrunch disbelieving.
“Neither Desdemona nor Cassio would ever say that.”

“They call me Honest Iago,¹² I’d never lie to you.”

“They shouldn’t. ‘Cause all I see are lies flying from your lips.”

Iago seethes. “I could say the same of you.”

V

Othello Residence, L.A., California, U.S.A.

Othello made bond,
a court hearing set for his assault charge on the officer.

Iago watches him stand, in the process of being discharged.

He fumes, thinking, *how could they let him off so easily?*

*I should make the Moor think he’s free while I
make him egregiously an ass.”*¹³

He turns his car around, heading
to the address on the manila folder in his passenger seat.

¹¹Shakespeare, 1.3.335.

¹²Shakespeare, 1.3.336.

¹³Shakespeare, 2.1.330-331.

The moon wanes into a crescent shape,
a kind of eye watching disapprovingly
over the events on Earth.
The heat of the summer settles in the cooler night air,
but still able to bring a sweat to one's brow.

Iago goes to the door, unhesitant,
twisting the doorknob with no luck.
He finds a slightly ajar window,
open enough to push himself through
and into the bedroom, where Desdemona dreams.

She sleeps in clean white lingerie
amongst a cloud of dark silk sheets.
Iago creeps, picking up anything he can use,
a golden throw-pillow. He pounces,
straddling Desdemona and bringing the pillow up to her face.
Pressing down harshly, her body spasms,
legs kicking out; toes pointed like a ballerina.
Iago holds on, sweat building under his rubber gloves,
teeth shining in the dim light as he strains.

When she stops moving, he turns to reach in his pockets,
gathering loose black hairs and fingerprints
to lay around the scene, erasing any trace
of his own responsibility.

JOCELYN LEARN

Bitter Boys Lie in the Arms of Sundressed Women

Finding you lingering there, where the sun peeks through the curtains.
Diagonal lines painted across your sharp features portraying them...softer.
The more reachable, plausible answer is to shut the curtains.

Stop that bit of

sun from humanizing you.

Drench,

drown you into darkness.

Cold as tiles in winter, warm under your body
a betrayal of character, that warmth, that sun.

That sun ought to know who it's shining on.

What body it's warming,

sin-eaten soul and heavenly features

how dare it warm you.

ALESHIA DE JAGER

Sjokolade soentjies en taai handjies

Ek wil julle klein-wees-tyd
vasbind met n lint en bewaar
soos n geskenk
wat ek ooren-oor vir myself kan gee
Ek wil die weerkaatsing
van sonlig in julle oë
vasvang en dit gebruik
om donker te bestry
Ek wil julle sjokolade soetjies
in n fles sit en gebruik
soos pleisters vir my hart
Ek wil n skatkis vul
met julle lag en dit strooi
oral waar ek gaan
Ek wil julle omgee-harte
vermenigvuldig om n see
van kleur oor die aarde te laat reën
Ek wil julle onskuldige, rein, siele
wegsteek van hierdie bose wereld
Ek wil julle klein, taai handjies
toevou in myne en dit
nooit-ooit weer laat gaan.
Tot dan, draai ek julle styf
toe in my gebede, elke aand,
en daarom kan julle rustig slaap
my altyd glimlaggende- en sonskykind.

Chocolate kisses and sticky hands

I would like to tie a ribbon
around the time you are little and save
it as a gift
to give to myself, over and over again,
I would like to capture
the reflection of sunlight
in your eyes and
use it to fight away darkness,
I would like to put your chocolate kisses
in a jar and use them
like band-aids for my heart,
I would like to fill a treasure chest
with your laughter and sprinkle
it wherever I go
I would like to multiply your
caring hearts to let a sea of colour rain
down over the earth,
I would like to hide away your innocent,
pure souls from this evil world
I would like to cover your tiny,
sticky hands in mine and
never ever let them go.
Until then, I'll wrap you tightly
in my prayers every night,
and therefore, you can sleep peacefully
my ever smiling and sunshine child.

TY PRANGER

The fifth time around and the red fatuity

Sixteen shards of amber SleepGlass,
crooked, lodged up in behind,
looking five times vulcanised.

An eyelid bowing from the sheer mass
turns loose the flock of pretty tears.

 But my heart withstood one fuzzy coup,
 kneaded deep into its peachy years,
 and then my home was near bereft of you.

Before, I was in stitches, pure mercury.

I recall that I was horned and wore
a rich, swimming, smiling, stupidity.

High hallelujahs for a CandyCorn storm!

I dreamt of a holiday CockTail lunch
sat stirring with your SisterSchool friends,
and the one whose curling spurs did end.

 I stood up, stumbled, had a hunch
 I'd catch the glance
 you needn't have pitched again.

And so was written the story of Summer's SleepIn.

Even our PlushGrudgeMatch, to no surprise,
could dish out four black ButtonEyes.

Come—indulge in BreakFast, while butter's beating
with the silver dust of LifeLongLent.

 At last, disgust, SlowStrained out of love,
 dries like TigerTiger stripes on cool cement,
 and it soon unglued my ViceGrip glove...

Resewn with unspooled foxglove flowers.
As the old ink is sponged up by snowdrifts,
droves of fraying LifeLines splatter,
like fifty hounds, who inch out from underarms
on the magnetic heels of mouth-watering mercy.
Or, that AngelFood-in-EggCup taste.
Or, just a kiss on the shoulder at some cloudcapt gate.
 The lilac twinkled, and with breathless ease
 we slept upon the woollen lake
 where algae bloomed with freshened pace.
This frigid anodyne that, soaked up in straw,
begilded four frostbitten boutonnières
that glare and weld till sore and seared.
There, did you spy the pearls and girls, love?
Or the red shred in the JewelBox
 that's restless, itching to spoil this?
 He marauds along unruly locks,
 a stressful lump who curdles bliss.
 You'd think he'd learn to take a hint.

JAMIE WALLMAN

Heart Strings

“Heart Strings” is an endurance-based, three-dimensional sculpture. Produced with red and black yarn, the shape of an anatomical human heart hangs by fragile, red strings. The strings are thin and are able to lift the heart, but there is a precarious nature to their relationship: if one string broke, would the heart come crashing down?

This artwork was produced through hours of knitting done by the artist in an attempt to connect and consider their own relationships to motherhood. From considering the act of knitting as a feminine craft to the hours of a person’s life put into something.

This artist considers the pressure put on AFAB (Assigned Female at Birth) individuals to bear children; that their worth in the world will come from having children. The artist grappled with self discovery in learning and unpacking all that came from realizing they had no desire for children of their own despite external pressure. The act of tirelessly knitting and then taking that yarn, balling it up and tying it into the shape of a heart shows the laborious task of discovering the self amidst a world that tries to define what you are for you.



NELSON FROTA COLARES

April 26th

And, as dandelion spreads over the prairies...

I can still hear the echo of his smile like the flutter of his wings,
as he flies away far enough to be just out of reach.

In the distance, there's a hint of sweet lavender,
the kind that leads to dreams, songs, and heartbreak.
The good kind, when you lose something that was worth losing.

But after losing my head in last winter's Wonderland,
I guess I'm a little weary of dreams.

Instead, I find serenity in the warm pond of this reality,
reinvigorating my innocence in the gentle waters of my quiet solitude.

Who knows when I'll fly again?
I've long given up on investigating the clues of time...

But oh, isn't it fun to dream?

That he would fly back and ruffle his psychedelic pink feathers
right into the pond of my Tuesday afternoons.
We would share the late Summer winds
and exchange songs mid-flight.

Dancing, swirling, spiralling
towards the endless possibility of a clear sky,
blue like the prairies in his eyes,
until the tweeting of our twilight feast became one...

Two wild starlings, roaming and owning the sky in soprano harmonies.

But that's a fairytale for a different tomorrow.

For now, I am content with the bedtime story of this poem,
and the frozen portrait of the mid-flight brush of our shoulders.

BONNEE DULLAARD

The Hit

Nothing. A breath in the background.
As the road pulls back, we feel elastic,
trapped and genetically bound,
we're shot through the barrel's black pavement.

The road pulls back fast, an elastic
snaps. As the pedal is pushed to the ground,
we're shot through the barrel's black pavement,
making no sound. Headlights pour out

while the pedal is slammed to the ground
and the daughter in the background sits,
making no sound. His head shouts out—
overridden by hurtling movement

till an indistinct passenger sits
behind his mind swerving around
in overriding hurtling movement,
with steering fists, we hear the loud

mind swerving, screeching around
the bent street, as he runs the risk
with steering fists, we hear the loud
barks of the hound in his pit.

The street bends, he runs the risk,
and in the front seat, she is screaming stop!
to the barking hound hungry for the pit
in the stomach. A nameless noun—

she is a scream in the front seat.
This is the hit: A whole life split
in the stomach of fear, a formless noun.
Into shapelessness, we shift—

This is what hits us. What splits
us apart, a family unbound.
The shapelessness. We shift into
nothing. A breath in the background.

ANNA MCCAUSLAND

Ghost Writer

Excerpt from a short play

Scene One

(Lights on Desk at rise: ALICE is sitting at the desk upstage dressed like she hasn't left the house in days. Alice is typing on the laptop taking sips out of various mugs and teacups. Two teacups sit on the kitchen island. Enter RITA from SR with a grocery bag in one hand and a script in the other. RITA's well put-together with business-casual clothes on.)

RITA

Alice? Dear? I'm home!

(ALICE shuts the laptop quickly.)

ALICE

(panicked)

Stevie? Is that you?

(Walks across stage and puts her things down on the kitchen island.)

RITA

No, it's Rita, dear.

ALICE

Oh. I must've forgotten that you were visiting.

RITA

Visiting? No, dear, remember I live here. With you.

ALICE

Oh? Really? With me and Stevie? Since when? Did he invite you to stay with us and not tell me? Again. Honestly, he keeps doing this!

(RITA moves toward ALICE but pauses at the back of the couch.)

RITA

(pause)

How about I make us some tea and we can chat?

(Awkward silence falls over the two women as RITA heads back SL to the kitchen island and makes tea. ALICE comes CS to the couch and sits down. Once RITA is finished with the tea, she sits beside ALICE handing her a mug.)

ALICE

Where is Stevie? Wasn't he filming with you?

RITA

Steve won't be coming home.

ALICE

Oh, is he going on another business trip? Did he tell me, and I just forgot? I've been doing that a lot lately.

RITA

No. No. *(beat)* Dear, Steve's dead.

ALICE

What? What do you mean? I— I saw him just yesterday. How is this even possible?

RITA

I know, I know. But dear, he's been dead for over fifteen years.

ALICE

But I— I— How is this even possible? Is this some cruel joke he's pulling on me?

RITA

No, it's not a joke dear. You've lost your long-term memory. I'm sorry, dear. The doctors say that it will slowly come back, and it has! But not all at once, so we're just taking it one day at a time. Sometimes this happens and we start from the beginning again.

ALICE

How could this have happened? How can I trust you and not my own memory?

RITA

Because, dear, I'm the only one who's stayed with you this entire time. I'm the only one here who takes care of you. I know that you were planning on writing that autobiography that you were commissioned to ghost write, but you most likely switched to your play instead. You were writing quite late last night.

ALICE

Was I?

RITA

You seemed quite passionate about it too.

ALICE

I don't know if that's enough to make me believe you, but I was very inspired today and got more writing done than I thought.

RITA

Oh good! Would you tell me about it?

ALICE

It's about this wild dream I had last night. But now I don't trust my own mind. Maybe it's not a dream?

RITA

Why don't you read it to me? I can tell you if it's real or not.

ALICE

And you won't make fun of me? Or my writing?

RITA

Of course not!

ALICE

I don't know Rita... I don't read my writing out loud. Besides it might not land well just me reading it. It's meant for the stage.

RITA

Well then, we'll act it out together.

ALICE

Rita, I'm no actress. At least not like you.

RITA

That's okay. Besides, it's just the two of us. I won't judge! I promise!

ALICE

Okay...

Scene Two

(ALICE grabs her laptop off of the desk and brings it over to Rita for her to read. Lights on just the couch.)

ALICE

Lights up on Steve, wearing his best suit, checking the cuffs of his jacket. He's standing just inside a big Hollywood party.

RITA

(interrupting)

What are you doing?

ALICE

I'm setting the scene. There is classy music floating through house. Hollywood executives mill around chatting and drinking.

(ENTER STEVE SR wearing his best suit, checking the cuffs on his jacket. Spotlight on him as he enters. SFX: classy party music plays lightly in the background and a light overlay of indistinct talking plays as well. ALICE gets up from the couch, leaving the laptop on the couch, and walks over to Steve. Lights up on all of DS. Lights down on CS as RITA studies the script on the laptop until her next line in the dark.)

ALICE

Stevie, stop fretting over your cufflinks. They look fine!

STEVE

Are you sure? I just don't know if they go well with this suit.

ALICE

They go perfectly together.

STEVE

Just like us.

ALICE

Awe, Stevie. *(pause)* Boy, I think we're late.

STEVE

Alice, love, there's no such thing as being late here. Only fashionably late.

ALICE

There's still a late in there.

(STEVE laughs and pulls ALICE closer, wrapping her in a side hug. RITA gets up off of the couch and moves towards the pair SR moving into the light.)

RITA

Steve! There you are! I was hoping you'd come!

STEVE

Rita! Good to see you! This is my wife, Alice. Alice, this is Rita. The leading lady in our latest movie!

ALICE

Lovely to meet you.

(ALICE sticks her hand out for a handshake. RITA accepts the gesture.)

RITA

Lovely to meet you too. I've heard from a little birdy that you're quite the singer. Is there any way we'll get a song or two out of you tonight?

ALICE

I don't know. Maybe.

STEVE

(jokingly)

We'll see how the rest of the night goes. I'm sure between the two of us we can get her to sing.

RITA

Here's hoping!

STEVE

So, Rita, it's been a while since I've seen you last. What have you been up to lately?

RITA

I've had quite a few acting gigs. I had three commercials. I booked that television show, but it won't start filming for another couple of months. And then the rest

of the time I was acting in an off-Broadway production out in New York.

ALICE

You were in New York?

RITA

For a few months.

ALICE

What is it like there?

RITA

Busy. Always busy.

ALICE

I've always wanted to live there but Stevie says that there's nothing there for him. So, Los Angeles is where we'll stay. But I've always wanted to go, at least once. I just know it would be the most inspiring place to write.

RITA

I'm heading out there in a few weeks, you should come visit. We'll make a whole trip out of it. Then you can get a taste for the city. Although be warned, once you get a taste of the bright Broadway lights, you'll be hooked.

ALICE

I might just have to take you up on that.

STEVE

(jokingly)

Or we can just stay here where the film industry is.

RITA

What's the fun in that? Right, Alice?

ALICE

Yeah, Stevie, what's the fun in that?

(RITA takes ALICE'S arm and leads her toward CS. STEVE trails after them.)

RITA

I think I'll just whisk you away from Steve. I can show all the exciting places that he's too scared to take you.

ALICE

You hear that, Stevie? I'm leaving you for Rita. It's decided.

STEVE

Oh, is it? Don't you think I get a say?

RITA

Nope.

(ALICE breaks off from RITA before they get to CS and walks back toward STEVE, taking his hand and pecking him on the cheek.)

ALICE

Of course, I won't leave you! I love you far too much.

STEVE

A woman of great words, my wife. I love you too much to let you go.

JORJA JOHNS

Girl Remains

There's lipstick on my cherry Coke, and I take my nudes in black and white,
I love how feminine the feeling of water and weed on an empty stomach is.

I take my meds dry and by meds I mean Tylenol,
I stopped the mood stabilizers and I feel more stable than ever.

I talk to my ex-boyfriend, and I ask when the voices stop, and he says they don't,
he holds me gently and tells me I deserve love different from his,
I am too naïve to realize maybe he is right.

The ring in my ear is the matching half to the one in your nose,
bits of me entangled into you,
like the scar you left on my hip.

I can't shake this feeling; I can't shake myself of myself
I am still everywhere and everyone I have ever been.
Every bit of me is girlhood in some form,
the romanticization of sadness just so it looks pretty.

I am not yet twenty and I regret the tattoos I got at eighteen,
I refuse to knit sweaters for the boys I love,
I am not superstitious, but I won't take the risk.

I cry every time I see couples in love,
friendly old men, and people who look like they might be good parents.
This week I mourn my grandfather for the first time in the five years since his
death,
I rub my wrists raw with perfume,
and I hate the sickness that took him from me years before he passed.

I am girl before I am human,
painted nails and rails to stay thin,
razor burn and sliced thighs for the smooth skin,
make a man love me and I'll be whole.

I have kissed the tears off his face, and it was not romantic;
it was just sad.

GAVIN THOMAS

The Human Condition

	Loving people
	Love
	People
ARE PEOPLE	Loving people
WE PEOPLE ARE	Loving
MUST PEOPLE BE	How do we not grow weary?
PEOPLE WANT	How do we still Love?
PEOPLE	How do we give grace?
WITHOUT PEOPLE	Give Grace
IS TO BE	Give Love
PEOPLE TOGETHER	Give grace without Love
PEOPLE WITHOUT	Give Love without Love
PEOPLE PEOPLE	
	Love

This poem is meant to express the idea of love. Life is dependent on one thing. One purpose. One power. One ideal. Everything boils down to love, with all its messes and confusions, the heartbreaks, and the losses. Like the poem, it has borders, and borders being broken. Love is messy, and confusing, and is seen in an infinite number of different perspectives. My father used to tell me, "Love isn't Hollywood, it's hard work." I like to think it's a bit of both. Because love is like magic. We struggle our entire lives searching for love. The love of family and friends, love of life and all it contains, and the love that blossoms between two people. It's messy and hard and it often feels like it's fleeting, but love makes it all worth it. I believe love is a gift from God, and we have a choice to step into it, or attempt to go on without it. At the end of the day, I will always choose to love.

TY PRANGER

Let's

What have we accomplished?

accomplice

1 9, 2 0, 2 1, 2 2, 2 3...

We are acquitted?

But it billows over Puget Sound,
looming like an exhausted orca.

Our resident love, fine toothed,
envied. Now adulterous.

Transformed into a feast of smog
my fingertips curl around and

I will (choked)

breathe in your name twice.

(with Fear)

Once,

in the rustle of the weeds in a
dream: a man on a retirement trip
to New Mexico. He saw your husband's
head descend on a porch. The red
sun was low, the lawn? was mowed, and
[my own] drove carefully. You were
unseen, in the study alone.

The other

was in the kneejerk from an office
on a third floor where I was in-
firm, bedbound by our activity

yesterday morning. Sweat glistening like new grass? on my forehead.
The closet. It was full of
(sick).

Having read that let's
exhale it. All of it.

(July October December
February April July AugustSeptember.)

, understand?
We are some long corner.
(woeful, like any circle)

We won't
Stow this empathy in the overhead compartment.
Remember how
I hesitated, how I sold out,
how the rhubarb went to seed, in spite of everything
how, who am I kidding
You know.

always,
I love you.
I'm sorry, it was
so beautiful and
so terrible.
Peace & pasture
comes. and come out
see me
one day, will you?
and that's ok.

TARUN SHARMA

Serendipitous Symphony

I wasn't supposed to click something this clean. I take tons of photos a day because in my head I am a professional photographer, and my 89 Instagram followers are my clients and if I don't regularly post, my stock prices would plummet. So, I keep clicking random things and sometimes end up clicking something as good as this one.

This gem, a fog-draped cityscape, was an accidental marvel. As I feverishly framed the towering structures, the photograph unexpectedly unfolded into a harmonious composition. Enter the uninvited stars of the show—the birds, seemingly on a payroll from the photography gods. They swooped into the frame, transforming a routine urban click into a poetic narrative.

In this chaotic pursuit of imagery, I stumbled upon a moment where the city's stoic skyline met the whimsical choreography of winged messengers. The birds, unplanned and unscripted, added an unforeseen layer of grace to the narrative. As I play the role of both photographer and inadvertent storyteller, "Serendipitous Symphony" is a testament to the magic that unfolds when spontaneity and creativity collide. It's a reminder that in the world of incessant clicks, sometimes the most captivating stories are the ones we never meant to tell.



TY PRANGER

Velveteen

Distending
hoarse, hard behind me. Take a
breather:

Me and my friend
we are so out of shape.
Flush, dressed
in itchy gloves
in the middle
of the street
between the stripes.

my left.

your right hand over

But let's say
they were tired
and cold
respectively.

Latent heat,

Leant
above warm curbs.

I draped like boys do.

Crown:
cathedral of coral or wool or moss,
nestled in your whorls of braidless blood

Two red stigmata

Two stags

Touch-shallow, circulation shy

lit by the prod of palmistry

Like anthers

or red antlers,

realized by winter's love.

You stirred and didn't make

A sound, or eye contact

until the moths

all but a few

had speckled the bright yellow moon,

laughing all the while

through the swirling, sawdust dream.

XAVIER IBRAHEEM

Workers' Comp

The chainsaw revs, the earth creaks and crumbles, almost trembling at the mechanical whirl approaching the skin. No blood leaks, only congealed sap and melted moss. Unreliable Husqvarna, reliable Carhartt. My tools, me, a tool. A truck backfires in the horizon letting me know civilization hides behind old growths. Oil on cement, black and gooey, adhering to any surface it stains and splotches, sinking far below the recesses privy to a guided eye. Getting up early and doing oil changes, singeing my hands. Blackening my nails all because I dropped the drain plug and forgot an engine best runs hot, searing its insides together and creating motion. No more movement. Watching the black tar spill out, wondering if a pterodactyl or raptor powers my expedition across the fields of burned-out grass. The weak inherited the Earth; moved the drain pan. Picking Guinness instead of Stella, and Peroni instead of a Corona, I water my petunias with stale barley and reach for the screwdriver. The summer is ending, my flowers recede, and the pine trees show themselves in. The blade catches, wedges push and control gravity. The Pinus tower falls, groaning, ground reverberating power. A pine log cracks my skull, severs nerves, fractures my spine, and exacts Nature's vengeance. I fall. My beer spills, cigarette cherry obscuring itself among the short, dead grass. Drain plug in, filter cross-threaded in, my brains out. Sanguine ooze covers and blinds, an arm no longer responsive, blackout, seize, and deadpan into the sky. Maimed. Chunks of tooth and crimson saliva spit among the brown foliage. A dizzy yelp for God? No. Only syllables of vertigo now. Engine starts, in motion, nobody's home. Honk, turn my hazards on, leaking transmission fluid all the way to the body shop. In the driver's seat, I call for help, no change. Forgot the number for home. Hearing pleas and prayers while tending to my craft, recounting tools broken, and money made over twigs and tree rings. Wet season. The saw redlines, stalls. Broken. Machines need replacement; the parts wear out. My bloody hardhat and chipped glasses are substituted with casts and slings. Imbursed with mutilation. Twenty dollars an hour, twenty-two with more saw-time, one faller per tree, one worker per death. One claim per invalid, reimbursement discounting limbs and teeth. Submit your pay stubs by the end of October.

LAUREL LOGAN

Cherished Relief

I eat the popcorn
off my ceiling as Jenni Olson's
San Francisco projects onto
my bedroom wall, while my sleeping
pill cocktail languidly transports
me inside her film where I curl
up on concrete sidewalks as plush
as couch cushions: my body a question
mark turned sharp tack that
stands up straight to claim
with my whole bright chest that
I am here

for now, for the night, for as
far as the taffy puller will stretch
my world without spreading it too
thin. Yes, of course I wake up
in a sweat, I walked the hills
of San Francisco all through the night.

SHAUNE LEWIS

The Burro

Excerpt from *The Smile Behind the Veil*

Past waxy creosote and proud emerald trichocereus, the Burro of the southern oasis wandered through his own arid kingdom. The beige silty earth was not dense, and it would kick up in the zephyrs. The land was flat and endless. He could not speak, but he observed as he had done for eons. The loneliness of the place would be crushing over such swaths of time, but the Burro was untroubled. He plodded, and rested in the sun, and watched the shifting sands of the desert and how the cacti and shrubs grew each year. Central to the territory that he roamed was an oasis. A curious turquoise jewel in the sands, it was shrouded in lush shrubs and palms in the uniform desert. Here the Burro would rest, and drink from the cool water that came up through the earth. Tan-coloured birds and lizards and the odd jackrabbit would find their way to the oasis and the Burro would see them go about the business of living. To him, their lives were mere moments.

The herd of people that arrived at the oasis were starved and thirsty. They carried wrapped bodies of several of their kin who had perished during their journey. Their skin was dark from the sun, and they wore thin cloth and had few possessions. The waters nourished them, and they ate the fruit of the palms. They built thatched huts, and cooked lizards and small birds. The Burro regarded them with gentle amusement. He rejoiced in their activity—the best thing going after such solitude. They were grateful to not have perished in the desert crossing, to have found this life-sustaining place by some divine provenance. The people's births, deaths, small egoic dramas, and activities of daily life were captivating. The Burro went unmolested, the people knew he had been here for ages. They knew that he saw them not as they saw themselves. The oasis sustained the people for some generations until a different group of men arrived. The newcomers were great in number, and their campaign was outfitted with many implements.

The simple inhabitants of the oasis were slaughtered. Their bodies were dismembered and placed atop a high sand dune in piles. A priest knelt and prayed and burned an offering as the vultures swooped and tore at the flesh. The ritual

consecration of a new transient order. Materials were hauled in, and structures erected all around the oasis. The blue water was diverted in dikes. Garish saloons and flop houses grew rapidly, and people flowed in and out of the place. The Burro's southern oasis was now a hedonic place, a remote curio in the sea of sand. It attracted those with a dark affect—grifters, gamblers, and drunks. Dominion officials had built this place intentionally, an island far removed from the sprawl of the territory proper. A desert outpost without law, a place for malevolent indulgences. Like a glass fly trap, the oasis enticed a certain sort, and kept them.

The Burro wandered the dusty tracks and drank from the waters that were now sullied with waste. The men governed the place and would beat the old Burro with reeds when they liked. Few saw in his eyes that he was not a mere beast. He was nearly invisible to them, in his own kingdom. He milled about and ate discarded scraps. Only children showed him kindness and would at times pat his nose, and scratch behind his ears. He observed the ruckus and the fights. Men gambled in the cantinas and drank, and tempers would boil over. Bodies would tumble into the dusty street and wrestle and a throat would be cut without sentiment. The corpses for the vultures—rent paid. Only tattered cloth and dark stains on the earth would remain.

Lives came and went. The Burro observed countless sunrises and sunsets. The men that came to this place came with violence and greed that sullied it. They moved as insects to the patient eyes of the Burro. He stood on four legs near the open-air cantina at the edge of the settlement. The high sun beat on the curved earthen slat roof and the drunks hid in the shade beneath. A warbling tune on a wax cylinder drifted from the cantina. The raucous din of the patrons was low now in the heat of the day. The men were only silent in the presence of the man they called Il Bruto—who did not drink, but killed and took without challenge. The men who found themselves here were bums and drunks, but Il Bruto was something different. Il Bruto enacted his viciousness as others breathed or ate. On this day he spoke to the old Burro.

“In this place, only we two are not beasts...” said the man. “You go unnoticed. Yet you do not evade my sight.”

The Burro stared with large black eyes, as flies buzzed, and the man tousled the wisp of grey hair between the Burros' ears.

“Just as I, you are subject to the music of time,” breathed the man. “We are cursed to hear the piece more fully. They glimpse only a phrase. Stinking wretch-

ed tourists, dumb beasts. I am permitted to hear one movement, more than most, and you will listen attentively from the first note until the last. The tail of the sound will reverberate and die and then the piece will exist only in your mind. Do you know that hatred arises in me when I am consumed by your black eye?"

The Burro stumbled back as the man viciously kicked its ribs. The man's eyes were wild and unblinking. His yellow teeth gleamed beneath his black moustache. Spittle clung to the corner of his mouth, and he drew out a knife from the leather scabbard that hung from his belt. He lunged and gripped one ear of the Burro and sliced. The Burro screamed and brayed, a performance for onlookers. He knew that he could not truly be harmed, by this man or by any other.

Il Bruto kept the trophy in his pocket, and boasted of it to those who would listen. The thing that he had taken from the old Burro that milled about the town. The severed appendage did not quench the hatred within him in the way he had hoped. Il Bruto became sullen as years passed. His brow drooped and his eyes did not open widely or gleam. He ceased to kill or take or do anything at all and was dust in the street. Forgotten.

The one-eared Burro stood on the crest of the Oasis. Each night he saw the sun set on the curious place in the desert. He listened with a single ear to the rabble of the drunks and gamblers. He felt the soft sand beneath his hooves. He inhaled the scent of the creosote bloom in his nostrils and felt only love.

KELSEY ROBSON

Autumn Birth

Enveloped by dusk,
beneath the tears of a willow tree,
I am born amongst yellow chrysanthemums.
And above me in the branches of the tree
Sat a raven that, too, was weeping for me.

The willow and the raven quickly grew tired
of consoling my cries,
So the raven took to pecking my eyes,
And the willow reached down
To fill my throat with leaves.

With blurry eyes and stolen speech
I kept quiet and observed, as

The raven and the tree

forgot about me.

NOAH JOHNSON

In Terms of Chess: The En Prise of the “Mythical” Panromantic Asexual

More than fourth base, chess describes all the different plays within the game.
I prefer not to play, but the decision is often not seen as an option in
modern-day relationships.

As people’s assumptions of my preferences
often lay waste to my real intentions.

Putting on a face when talking with fake friends to pretend I
causally *castle*: a non-*amateur* move, I know how to conduct to my advantage.

When in fact, we did everything except
what people thought we wanted.

I would constantly feel fraudulent in my adult relationships with people
I genuinely loved.

Just by not doing what society says I should do
with a body from whom I loved the personality of.

The way they would start their stories with the ending,
dragging an explanation behind every other word.

Afraid of assumptions going against their message,
they would stutter and pause, collect their thoughts,
just to stutter and pause again.

I liked their rhythm of movement; their signature beat of going down the stairs.
The way their hands would try to catch the words that their mouth missed
as if they could physically remove the sound from the atmosphere.
Words they would repeat like a catchphrase.

The way they would say affirmations to me
with more meaning behind the words
than I could simulate in front of a mirror.

Their handsome aesthetics had thought dripping behind,
wearing what felt right, pleasing to the eye.
Clothes that were only worn in certain moods,
hoodies that would scream “did not have a good weekend!”
So, I would avoid asking “how are you?” and spent
my energy trying to make them feel comfortable enough to take the hoodie off.
Consensually and naturally exchanging clothes into better moods.
And I loved them, but I doubted that fact
against my lack of sexual feelings adjacent to
what felt like the world’s sharp terminal point of view.

They made the first move into a chess game I did not want to play.
I felt pressured to set up the match
when they questioned my weak argument against them.
Patzer: their tactics felt
not thought through.
Touch move: playing with society’s rules
I felt *zugzwang*: forced into sacrificing my pieces for no advantage.
The *fifty-move rule* was ignored,
shuffling many of their pieces on my board as they *pinned* me into *checkmate*.
Not the same sensation I gathered from *The Queen’s Gambit*.
Unimpressed with my internal conflict, I left.
Both of us, naked.

A new match, time clock started, counting down before another doubted
my involvement.
Personally,
I liked his transition from a smile into a joking side gesture
into a small laugh followed by
a glance
at myself as if I were the only ears in the room.

There was an ambiance of his musical presence
as he played sequences of sounds from his left front pocket.
I liked his bobbing of head, as humming indicated a song wedged
in his soul, beating a rhythm outward.
Safely feeling unstoppable for 13 seconds
mouth and body tuned to the Mario invincibility theme
while he peacefully cleaned the kitchen every Saturday.

He feared speaking up in crowds larger than five and going against
the conversation
but his face told stories like constellations, combinations of eye rolls and
head nods
like star placements.
I enjoyed his cute frantic scramble of where to place his hands
shaking them around while walking.
So, I would usually hold on to them, asking first.
And I loved him, but he made me believe I was leading him on.

He questioned his body as if I were making a mockery of our relationship,
with many sleepovers without a chess board present,
enabled a *blitz*: a *blunder* on my behalf.
I forced myself to pretend to enjoy the game
just to calm his wandering presence and vocal questions.
But to flag: his *skittles room* habits
constantly overstepped to where I was comfortable, with boundaries broken.
Faking a smile
“*I resign*” with my king knocked off the table.
He left
after I reminded him of my identity.
As if he was waiting all along
for my mediocre *ratings* to disprove myself.

No timer started the third time, I attempted to entertain the thought of
not playing chess.

The game was never a choice on my behalf, personally
I liked her constant callbacks
using the past to move the present forward.
Inside jokes that isolated the two of us from a crowd like we were speaking
alien languages.
I loved the way she used car rides to test their vocal range
as we did *Carpool Karaoke* without James, or cameras in our way.
Loved when,
she would do something stupid and would tell me
without defending herself with excuses,
pure passion would emit from her eyes, while her nose was askew.

I loved her retelling of movies, especially the ones I saw.
Rehearsed words flowed from her lips as if she had the world for an audience,
she would not skip a beat and acted out most of the scenes;
energy encouraged by eager eyes.
And she would tell the plot better than the movie could.
She kept her letters in lowercase, still her presence would fill the page
teaching me about the world in a new perspective, writing me poetry,
and words of affirmation.
She did not play chess as well, allowing me to breathe within our relationship.
Both Kings and Queens standing tall, unmoved, forever winning.

LYDIA GUNNINK

Mid-War Celebration

*meltdown, mud, this endless trudge –
hands unfolding letters you barely wrote.
The march continues on the other side.
The horizon claws you back with white fingers*
–“Post War Procession” by Anita Lahey

you cry the night you turn twenty
your brother returns from hunting
antlered head slung over his shoulder
dropped in the freezer carelessly
right onto the ice cream cake with
pink icing curving into your name, “y” smudged
muffled scream as you pry the lid open
frost bites your fingers as you grip the bone
liberated chocolate is a mess, it’s all too much
meltdown, mud, this endless trudge

from damp pillows to endless classes
frigid rain bleeds the ink of hollow words
last night, your forty-dollar nail chipped
a mess of pink crescents and dried carnage
a failing grade has you crying in the bathroom
picking at the polish, wishing it’d erode
along with the deadline of an irrelevant history
paper in your pocket, only a word scrawled
naked fingers brush against ghosts
hands unfolding letters you barely wrote

history unfolds on the other side of the ocean
where bullets scavenge for humans
and humans scavenge for poisoned water
clear water turns pink
the pink plastic ring blown off her finger
rough fingers ruin innocence, girls hide their cries
no one can hide from the rain of fire
firing guns are the lullaby of the night
the night falls on them, while in the light
the march continues on the other side

one foot in front of the other, you dodge the puddle
careful not to spill your iced latte on your way
from empty lectures to nail appointments
“come celebrate tonight,” not yet
though you’re a far cry from roughing it
you drop your brother off to turn deer into dinner
girls wait at the beach with chocolate cupcakes
sky smudged with fire, pink clouds dance in the waves
sand bleeds with salt water, your attention lingers
the horizon claws you back with white fingers

Author Biographies

ERIC BATEMAN is a business student and hobbyist fiction writer. He's currently working on an adult fantasy novel and dreams of moving to Europe, but would maybe settle for Québec.

ANNABEL BOT is a first-year student at UFV, enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts program with a major in French and a minor in Creative Writing. She has loved both reading and writing her whole life, whether it be poetry, fiction, or short stories. Some of their other hobbies include horse riding, bingeing crime series, and napping with their grumpy cat Tiger.

VIVECA BRAATEN is an alumni student from UFV who studied English, History, and Education. She is currently a Learning Assistance teacher in Chilliwack, writing poetry sporadically and reading even less so. She has an unhealthy addiction to candy and tea, and you can find her out in the wild at your local Value Village buying unnecessary items to fill her house even more than it already is.

SAVANNAH BURROWS is an eighteen-year-old student completing her first year at UFV. She lives across the river in Mission, B.C., and hopes to become a mental-health counsellor one day.

CINDY CASTRO is a fifth-year Bachelor of Arts student, majoring in English and minoring in Philosophy. She is first-generation Canadian because her parents sacrificed their degrees, family, and language to be here. So, it's become essential for Cindy to keep Mexican traditions alive and thriving across borders in honour of her parents. She says, "If you're an immigrant, I am proud of you because it is not an easy road. I hear you, and I see you."

ALESHIA DE JAGER is currently enrolled in the Qualifying Studies program at UFV, that will lead to further studies and a change in career paths. She has a keen interest in poetry and enjoys the process of crafting sensuous experiences into words. She immigrated from South Africa four years ago, where she grew up, lived, and worked as a dietician. She is a mother of two, wife, sister, daughter, and a lover of nature.

AVERY DOW-KENNY has always been passionate about writing and art. Graduating in April 2024 with a Bachelor's of Fine Arts in Visual Arts and Creative Writing, she hopes to one day become a published author and feels small literary magazines like this one are great stepping stones into the publishing world for all aspiring writers.

BONNEE DULLAARD is a second-year student at UFV, majoring in English. She lives with her partner and their three cats. Bonnee loves to be alone, and loves reading, writing, going on walks, and hiking.

GERRY EGGERT claims that at age eighty-two, he is likely the oldest student attending UFV as an undergraduate student. Now in his sixth semester, he credits the quality of his professors and the encouragement of his fellow students for a healthy GPA and the renewed energy to continue on his quest to graduate with a Bachelor of Integrated Studies. He indicates he never considered himself a candidate for pursuing serious writing until he took two courses from the inspiring UFV Professor John Caroll. Gerry had a previous poem, "The Farm Wife," published in *The Zine*, the student-run university literary magazine.

CARLY FLEMING is a fourth-year student at UFV who is pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree in English with a concentration in Creative Writing. Her goal is to become an elementary school teacher and work toward attaining her Master's in Creative Writing. When Carly is not writing, typically in the genres of poetry or fiction, she can be found exploring the great outdoors or producing art in other creative forms such as painting and crocheting.

NELSON FROTA COLARES is a queer writer from Brazil, currently studying Creative Writing and Art History through the Fine Arts program at UFV. His poetry is not special, groundbreaking, nor particularly powerful, often exploring the common themes of romance, loneliness, and identity. Nevertheless, it is genuine and authentic (as much as popular poetry can be), and he prides himself in being a quiet yet contributing voice in a generation of young lonely poets tortured by solitude, taxes, and heartbreak.

LYDIA GUNNINK is a third-year UFV student who lives and writes from Cloverdale, B.C....but it's okay because she spends her forty-minute commute mentally scrawling poetry as she admires God's gorgeous creation. If she isn't writing, she's either performing on a stage of her imagination or travelling to Roshar, New Beijing, or Isla de los Sueños. When she's actually in this world, she can almost always be found with her family and friends, all of whom she loves very dearly.

PIPER HORNALL is a twenty-one-year-old auteur whose critically lauded approach to photo composition has staggered her profs and peers alike. She's known by her rabid fandom as "the Annie Leibovitz of architectural photography" and has had her work published by Instagram pages across the Lower Mainland. In 2023, she was inexplicably snubbed when Jones Soda did not accept a really neat photo of her cool brother, who definitely did not write this.

XAVIER IBRAHEEM is a poet from Mission. He is in a Bachelor of Arts program at UFV and looks forward to one day teach high schoolers English Literature and History in a meaningful way. His poems in this issue were influenced by nature and he hopes readers are just as mesmerized with the night sky as he is. He also hopes to provide company and solace through his poems to those who feel they are alone in the world. Xavier aspires to one day own a shelter for cats and work as a writer.

JORJA JOHNS is an English major with a concentration in Creative Writing at UFV. After she graduates, she hopes to become a teacher, and continue writing poetry. She's a lover of the outdoors with two dogs, and is trying to encourage herself to read regularly again, and write more frequently.

NOAH JOHNSON is a twenty-three-year-old Canadian poet and artist living on the unceded territory of the Stó:lō Nation. They love writing love poems to their partner that say more than "I love you." Noah finds themselves caught in wonder by the beauty of the sky and confused by the passage of time. They aspire to give asexuality more recognition. Noah is a Virgo, enjoys hyping up their partner's amazing jewelry business @sharonleejewelry, and likes bubblegum ice cream.

MORGAN KING is a UFV student.

JOCELYN LEARN is a first-year UFV student. She enjoys when her bird stops screaming and she can do homework, but alas that never happens. She writes poems and fantasy stories, preferably when it's raining. She's striving to become a social worker and to publish a book in the future.

SHAUNE LEWIS is a student at UFV. Born on the Sunshine Coast, he is pleased to be back in a post-secondary environment exploring the craft of writing after two decades working as an animator. He currently resides in Abbotsford, B.C. with his wife Jessica and their dog Ralph.

LAUREL LOGAN is a UFV alumni and a literacy and math tutor. Above all else, she loves watching and thinking about movies. Currently, she's interested in the Italian giallo, the films and poetry of Pier Paolo Pasolini, and Jenni Olson's cinematic essays.

ANNA McCAUSLAND is a writer pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree at UFV. Anna is inspired by everyday life and takes a more storytelling approach to all her work. She loves writing in multiple formats ranging from poetry to screenplays and hopes to be able to continue to write whatever pops into her head and maybe even get published in major literary journals one day.

ZEKE MORALES is a B.C.-based artist who has written two novels and over a dozen short stories. Enthralled by psychology, his works centre around moral and societal dilemmas rooted in troubling histories that need not be forgotten. Currently, Zeke is working on his third novel centered around the Holocaust, and a music album influenced by the likes of Nirvana, Queen, the Beatles, and dozens more.

TY PRANGER is a third-year student studying English and History at UFV. They're interested in music of all varieties, religion, linguistics, gender, and poetry. Ty's been interested in writing poetry since early adolescence, but began writing in earnest in the summer of 2022. Their biggest inspirations are musician-poets like David Tibet, Bill Fay, Laura Nyro, Jhonn Balance, Scott Walker, Tom Rapp, Townes Van Zandt, and countless others.

KELSEY ROBSON is a UFV student.

TARUN SHARMA is from India, and moved to Canada about two years ago. He is pursuing Computer Science degree at UFV. Tarun has always had a thing for filmmaking and photography and wanted to be associated with this domain somehow, if not full-time. He clicks and posts pictures and music videos on social media. Also, he loves Tarantino.

GAVIN THOMAS is a third-year English major who plans to go into a Bachelor's of Education. He discovered his passion for poetry in his first year at UFV, and has continued to pursue poetry as a creative outlet. As an English major, he has a natural obsession with reading and writing. Currently, he is working on a fantasy novel titled *Swords of Psychomachia*, but hopes to continue to publish his poetry as well. Other than English, Gavin enjoys basketball, hiking, travelling, and serving at his local church. Above all things, Gavin loves Jesus and spending time with his family and friends.

JAMIE WALLMAN is a UFV student.

ABIGAIL WHEELER is a fourth-year student at UFV majoring in Philosophy. She grew up in Newfoundland and has lived in B.C. for almost nine years. In her free time she is an avid book reader and tends to lean towards fantasy books with no shortage of emotional damage. Abigail feels inspired to dabble in creative writing partly due to her childhood in Newfoundland and partly due to the many wonderful and fantastical stories she has read over the years.

SPENCER WIEBE is a third-year student at UFV, pursuing a Bachelor of Media Arts degree. Spencer enjoys the creation, consumption, and discussion of art in its many forms, with a keen interest in traditional visual arts, and media such as film, comic books, and videogames. His goal is to be involved in the creation and dissemination of stories that resonate with and hopefully inspire people.

The Loudon Singletree is UFV's literary and visual arts journal. Since its inception in 2009, the Loudon Singletree has been a forum in which students, alumni, faculty, and staff of the university can share their creative work.

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